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# FACE OF A VICTIM

By

ELIZABETH LERMOLO

Translated from the Russian by

I. D. W. TALMADGE

Foreword by ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY

This is the first-person story of a 32-year-old woman, who, in 1934, the night after the assassination of Sergei Kirov, was picked up by the Soviet secret police and, after torture and endless interrogation—at one point by Stalin himself—was confined for eight years in a series of prisons in the Urals and Siberia.

Elizabeth Lermolo had no connection whatever with the murder. She didn't need one. She was the wife of a former Czarist officer; she had refused to become an informer for the secret police; she had held several conversations with a neighbour's epileptic nephew—Leonid Nikolayev, who, in the event, fired the shot that killed Kirov. During "the terror" this was more than enough to set in motion the irreversible processes of the secret police.

Now, twenty years after her arrest, Elizabeth Lermolo sets down the story of her eight-year education in prison. What happened to her is enough of a drama in itself, and she herself remains with the reader as an unforgettable figure at once tender and indestructible.

But she also met others—in prison vans, and convict trains, and dungeon hospitals, and exercise yards—the assassin's former wife, who was near Kirov when he was killed . . . Lenin's personal chef, doomed to live out his days in

solitary confinement . . . an old, bewildered woman whose niece had been groomed for the role of Stalin's mistress . . . a former aide of Stalin who told her how Stalin had arranged to have Kirov murdered . . . they all talked to her as they had not talked and would not talk to their captors and their torturers.

So it was for eight years. From a woman in a prison hospital she learned of the last night in the life of that woman's girlhood friend and companion—Nadezhda Allilieva, who had been Lenin's secretary and became Stalin's second wife. In Siberia she shared a cell with the woman who had shipped her off to her first "isolator"—a devout Communist who had worked in the secret police for twenty years, and who now could not stop talking of the executions she had seen and taken part in. And, from a fellow prisoner whose face she never saw, Elizabeth Lermolo learned the techniques of "psychological self-defence" . . . to one of which, memory training, we owe this book.

What we have here is not simply an unprecedented, unparalleled documentation of the means by which a dictator made use of a murder he himself had arranged in order to exterminate every vestige of opposition, real or imaginary, to his personal power. By now, the world—outside Russia—knows that is what happened. But here the nameless, faceless victims of tyranny acquire names and faces . . . names, faces, families, lovers, lives. There is no way to say it, except to say that they become profoundly real, profoundly touching, somehow dear to us—even those who in earlier days helped to destroy others. That is because they became dear to Elizabeth Lermolo. That—and her survival—is her triumph.



*Face* O F A *Victim*





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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY  
I. D. W. TALMADGE • WITH A FOREWORD  
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*London*

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## Foreword

It is not surprising that I, a Russian by birth, should find this book of very great interest and want it brought to the attention of Americans who seek understanding of my people still living behind the Iron Curtain. During my years in America, and through my association with the Tolstoy Foundation, I have known many of the new refugees from Russia, and I have heard from them many amazing stories—shocking, heartbreaking stories. None, in my memory, has touched me more deeply than Elizabeth Lermolo's stark account of what happened to her following the notorious assassination of Sergei Kirov in 1934, when by a shameless miscarriage of justice she was made to spend eight years in Soviet political prisons.

Each of us reads into a book something of his own experience, and each of us demands something special from his reading. To many this will be a book of sensational revelations about Lenin and Stalin and the people close to them in the Kremlin. And it is true there is much revealed here that has never been common knowledge. But I shall remember Elizabeth Lermolo's story first of all for the people it portrays in such intimate detail that they are interesting, pitiful, and completely believable. They include rascals as well as men and women of quiet courage, like Elizabeth Lermolo herself, and

incredible numbers of innocent victims of a tyranny that menaces the world.

We hear much about the few people in high places in Russia who have been persuaded under pressure to sign false confessions. We hear little about the many who have had the pride and dignity to stand up against the oppressors. It is heartening to find in Elizabeth Lermolo's story many evidences of such simple courage in the face of horrors it is hard to contemplate. It gives hope that someday there will be an end to the suffering my people have had to endure.

ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY

# *Face* OF A *Victim*



## *Chapter I*

WHEN THE NKVD KNOCKED AT THE DOOR THE night of December 1, 1934, I assumed at first that it was an ordinary raid. During my years of exile in Pudozh such intrusions had become a commonplace. Periodically, the secret police arrived without warning to search the house in the hope of surprising us—"potential enemies of the Soviet state"—in illegal activities. It was soon clear, however, that this was not a routine check-up, but the climax to a day of surprising happenings.

Only on the larger maps of the USSR will you find Pudozh. Originally, this town in northern Russia was settled by the Old Believers, a dissident sect that had split away from the Russian Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century. Today, it is a place of exile for those accused, rightly or wrongly, of being dangerous to the regime.

I was in Pudozh under a five-year sentence as the wife of a convicted "counterrevolutionary." The fact that my husband had been an officer in the Czar's Army was the only charge against me for I had never belonged to a political party or engaged in political activity of any kind. To my family and friends I was even something of a phenomenon as they found it difficult to believe that anyone who had lived through the recent period of violent change in Russia could be as polit-



ically ignorant, or unaware, as I. "Naïve" was the word they used. Certainly I had no reason to believe that I was of special interest to the authorities; I was quite sure that I was not. What emotions of bafflement and resentment I felt I managed to conceal, and I knew myself to be a model member of the Pudozh community, co-operative and discreet. With others in similar plight, I shared residence in a communal house. An allowance from the state of seven rubles and forty-two kopecks (roughly \$1.50) each month took care of my maintenance and I kept myself occupied by teaching Russian to Trans-Caucasian women in exile with me. Once a week I was obliged to report to the local NKVD, or secret police (known variously, in different periods, as OGPU, NKVD, and—at present—MVD). For the rest it was a dull and monotonous existence. Even letter writing was a chore rather than a pleasure because all mail was censored and one wrote only such news and thoughts as could be shouted from the housetops. Of course, I had no communication whatever with my husband, at that time five thousand miles away in a concentration camp.

I have said that December 1 was a day of surprising happenings. For one thing, a letter had come that morning from the aunt with whom I had lived after my parents' death. It was the first in many months and I read and reread it in an effort to decipher the ambiguous phrasing. . . . Seemingly, all the family were alive and in good health, praise the Lord!

I was reading the letter again in the evening, anxious not to miss a shade of meaning in it, when one of my pupils, Fatima Shagry, burst into my room. Breathlessly, in her broken Russian, she exclaimed, "Did you hear the news? The radio just reported that Kirov has been killed."

"Kirov?" I asked. "Who is Kirov?"

Fatima was exasperated. "You are without doubt the most politically uninformed person I ever met. You really don't know who Kirov is? . . . He's the secretary of the Lenin-grad Communist Party, second only to Stalin."

"And why are you so excited?" I wanted to know. "Who killed him?"

Fatima shook her head. "It hasn't been announced yet. The radio just said that the assassin was 'a tool of the enemies of the workers and peasants.' Which means us and people like us. They'll hold us accountable for it."

This seemed to me absurd and I said so, but Fatima's only answer was "Wait and see."

A few minutes later another neighbor dropped in, to bring me the same news: "Have you heard? Kirov was assassinated."

"Oh, well," I said, "one scoundrel less."

But the neighbor would not have it that way. "You are wrong," he protested. "In the death of Kirov we exiles have lost a staunch protector." And when I objected that no Communist could be our friend, he went on to explain that Kirov had strongly favored the liberalization of the regime. "He wanted to curb the powers of the NKVD; he advocated the abolition of forced labor."

"And that is why he was assassinated by 'the enemies of the workers'?" I remarked with a wry smile.

"More likely," he answered me solemnly, "Kirov was done in by the enemies of reform."

It was all terribly confusing. But then, politics had always confused me.

As the evening passed, other exiles called—all greatly agitated by the news of the murder. I listened to their discussion and speculation, but with no feeling that the subject was of vital concern to any of us. How could it be? We were out of

the main current of public affairs, Leningrad was far away, and every move we made was well known to the authorities. Still, my visitors were so certain that Stalin would make use of the affair to settle old scores that, to be on the safe side, I built up the fire in the stove and threw in all my notebooks as well as the letter just received from my aunt.

It was some time after midnight when I heard loud noises in the corridor and the sound of shuffling feet. Then a knock on the door.

"Open up. This is the NKVD."

I obeyed. A cold wind swept into the room as the chief of the local secret police and several armed men entered.

"We have orders to search your quarters," the chief told me brusquely.

While I stood by, bewildered, the men ransacked my possessions without, apparently, finding anything of an incriminating nature. Elsewhere in the house other searches were being conducted. I heard men in the attic, the basement, also in the courtyard and outbuildings.

Finally the chief ordered me to gather up my things preparatory to leaving. I was permitted to take my most valuable personal effects, he explained, providing they did not exceed twenty kilograms in weight.

"But where am I being taken?" I asked.

"I can't tell you. You'll find out later. Hurry."

That was all. It was not yet dawn when I was loaded into a closed truck with others from the house and we were driven off under guard.

In the truck with me were so-called "free citizens" as well as political exiles, a couple of Communists, and a dozen or so non-party people—workers and municipal employees. What had caused us to be brought together? Where were we going?

Was there any possible reason to hope that we were not riding to disaster? . . . These and a hundred other thoughts occupied me on that long ride, for it was noon before we reached our immediate destination, the Petrozavodsk airport. Time to think of the past as well as worry about the present and future. Time to recall people, places and events leading to this night. . . .

How far away my childhood seemed, and how happy, on the family estate in southern Russia: the beautiful countryside, the devoted circle of family and friends. In contrast, my youth was joyless, spent in an atmosphere of hostility, lawlessness, and terror: for these were the stormy years of revolution.

In Passion Week, 1918, I was returning home from the Gymnasium for the Easter holidays. It was midday as I left the train at our local station three miles from my home and noticed unusual confusion among the milling crowd around the depot. To my surprise, no one was there to meet me, apparently the carriage had not been sent. So after a brief wait, feeling somewhat alarmed by the unfriendliness of the crowd, I decided to walk home.

About a mile from the station I encountered a group of drunken men on horseback, armed with rifles, who crowded me off the road and then roared with laughter when I fell into a ditch knee deep in mud. The incident increased my anxiety and I hurried the rest of the distance, not wholly unprepared for what I found.

Beyond the last bend of the road our house came into view—the gates ajar, a crowd of people filling the courtyard. As I drew near I saw that the house was being emptied of furniture, dishes, clothing—and then I caught sight of the

lifeless bodies of my mother, father, and older brother, their faces covered with blood. Several who were familiar to me, old family servants, came toward me crying:

"Dear girl, our loved one—oh, what a misfortune! Please don't think that this was done by our people. No, they came from the city, they called themselves Bolsheviks. They got here about an hour ago, and when your father and brother tried to stop them from wrecking the place, before our very eyes they shot your dear ones." . . .

So, homeless and helpless, I set out for the Don Region to stay with my aunt, my mother's sister. I had always been her favorite and she received me warmly, glad to afford me what protection she could. However, she herself lived in a state of fear for the Don Cossacks too had of late been behaving in a threatening manner.

I stayed with my aunt until the spring of 1920 when, having just reached my seventeenth birthday, I married Misha, a former student of the Petrograd Polytechnical School. He had served as an officer in the First World War and after the civil war had continued his studies. It was a marriage for love. Misha was very gentle and I felt safe with him as I had not felt for years. It seemed that happiness was again within my reach.

But a few months after our marriage my husband was arrested as an officer of the former Russian army, and was sentenced by the Bolsheviks to the Kholmogor concentration camp in the far north. He made his escape from the camp, but in the meantime my aunt and I had fled to the Caucasus to stay with distant relatives. For nearly two years communication with Misha was disrupted—until in the summer of 1922 he found me and took me with him to the Don Basin.

For a while then we knew peace. This was the period of

NEP, the New Economic Policy introduced by Lenin which permitted a limited amount of free trade. By hard work Misha and I managed to make a home, to achieve some comfort and a feeling of security. But it was not to last, for in 1930 my husband was again arrested by the Bolsheviks and sentenced for a term of ten years.

Our last meeting was in March, 1931, just before he was sent off to the concentration camp. It took place in a crowded and noisy hall set aside for visitors and a double screen separated us. With difficulty I made out his words as he explained that there was no specific charge against him, that he had been arrested because of his "past"—because he had been an officer in the Czarist Army and his father had been a landlord.

"I shall have to bear the stigma of counterrevolutionary so long as the Soviet government exists," he said, "and who knows how long that will be? As my wife, you too share that stigma. For this reason I urge you to get a divorce."

I was sure I had not understood him. I asked him to repeat what he had said.

"Think up some excuse, get a divorce, renounce me—lie if necessary. There is nothing disgraceful in it. All wives of condemned men do it these days. Then as soon as the divorce is formalized, change your residence. Move to the town of U. Should I succeed in getting out of the concentration camp, I will make my way to U. or to S., where your aunt is."

Numbly, I listened to him and agreed. Whatever happened, when we were free we would make our way to one of these places.

My time was up for visiting. A guard approached and pulled me away from the screen. "Misha, my dear, good-by." . . . "Good-by, my darling."

A last wave of the hand, and it was over. He was gone.

Renounce my husband? How could I? "All of them do it these days," he had said. But it was wrong—wrong!

Two months later, deprived of my rights and the means of earning a living, I was forced to apply for a divorce. With the formalities completed, I made preparations to leave for U. in two days. I was completely surprised when, suddenly, I was summoned to the OGPU, as the secret police were then called, for questioning. As a result, instead of going to U., I found myself in Pudozh a month later, exiled for five years. . . .

And now this new storm threatening. Dear Lord! Let there be an end.

## Chapter 11

ARRIVING AT THE PETROZAVODSK AIRPORT, WE were served hot tea to warm us, and presently were escorted to an airplane. Within a half-hour we were off, bound southward. None of us knew where we were being taken, nor why. We exchanged silent, bewildered glances.

In flight we heard the latest radio newscast regarding Kirov's assassination. It was reported that the assassin was someone called Leonid Nikolayev.

The name sounded strangely familiar. "Good God!" it suddenly occurred to me, "this couldn't possibly be the same Nikolayev who visited Pudozh a few months ago—the nephew of Linkova?" If so, I would probably have to appear as a witness. What a botcher.

Late in the afternoon, we landed at the Leningrad airport, to be rushed from there to the Regional Headquarters of the NKVD on Shpalerny Street. In the *kommandatura*, or administrative office, each of us was handed a questionnaire.

"You are cautioned to fill out these questionnaires truthfully," we were told. "Your future depends on it."

After turning in the completed questionnaires, we were taken to a large, cold, smoke-filled hall in the same building. Here, perplexed and anxious, we stood around in a group, pressing against the wall, stifling.



"It looks as if our turn has come," whispered one of my neighbors, a Communist.

"Oh, they won't keep us here long," said another. "It's only a formality. The problem is—how will we get home? As it happens, I haven't a kopeck on me."

"Don't you worry about that. They'll pay for our passage back," said the woman from apartment No. 9.

The conversation died down. No one felt like talking.

Suddenly there was a stir. The old woman Linkova entered. Everyone rushed toward her.

"Isn't your nephew's name Leonid Nikolayev?"

"So it is your nephew who is the assassin? Holy Mother!"

"It's on account of her that we were dragged here," yelled the Communist.

There were other cries and threats, in ugly voices.

Linkova dropped to the floor, near the door, and broke into a loud wail. She dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief, which she kept in the sleeve of her sheepskin coat.

Soon a grim-visaged official appeared, accompanied by several guards. He called out our names, counted us, then ordered the guards to take us to our cells. Mine was on the first floor of the Internal Jail. It was airy and warm, the bed was soft and the linen clean. Before I had time to look around, I was brought a dish of hot soup and a large chunk of bread.

No sooner did I finish eating when I fell into a deep sleep from which I was awakened in the middle of the night. A woman in uniform entered the cell and curtly ordered me to follow her.

She took me to a bathroom equipped with a shower. Here she told me to undress and scrub myself thoroughly, which I did. Then I was told to put on coarse, government-issued undergarments and a black sateen dress.

The woman now looked me over closely, from head to foot, then led me to the elevator. On the fourth floor we stepped into a long, wide corridor with innumerable doors on either side. The corridor was spick and span. A thick carpet covered the floor. Two NKVD men received me here and took me into one of the adjoining rooms, empty except for a massive desk and two leather couches. There I sat for a while.

Eventually, another NKVD man appeared. He looked me over carefully and "frisked" me for any concealed weapons. Then he escorted me to a room at the door of which two sentries with rifles were standing at attention.

The NKVD man pressed the doorbell. Out of the room came a man, about forty years of age, who exuded an air of self-importance. My escort snapped into attention.

"This, Comrade Deputy Minister, is the citizeness Lermolo."

The deputy minister scrutinized me, then pointing to the half-opened door said sharply, "Go in."

I found myself in a large room furnished with heavy oak pieces. At one end was a bulky desk and, perpendicular to it, a long conference table covered with a green cloth. On both sides of this table were chairs.

Behind the desk sat an elderly, bald-headed, pock-marked man wearing a military tunic without insignia. He was engrossed in the papers lying before him, and paid no attention to me. On the wall in back of him hung a large portrait of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. Other walls bore portraits of the lesser leaders.

In one of the chairs at the conference table sat another elderly, pock-marked man. His Georgian features, mustache, bushy hair, and the shape of the eyebrows reminded me of Stalin.

The deputy minister led me toward the table, to a place opposite the Georgian, and, holding his right hand in his trouser pocket, said to him: "Joseph Vissarionovich, this is the White Guard woman who is mentioned in Leonid Nikolayev's notebook."

I pricked up my ears. "Did you say I'm mentioned in Nikolayev's notebook?" I exclaimed.

"One must mind one's manners," said the deputy minister gruffly. "Don't you know enough to greet people when you meet them?"

I decided to disregard his reprimand. I had missed the opportunity to show the usual courtesy at the right moment, and now I was in no mood to make up for it when rudely ordered to do so.

"Is she the one who had direct contact with Nikolayev in Pudozh?"

"The very one, Joseph Vissarionovich."

"Sit down," said the Georgian, pointing to a chair opposite him.

The name and patronymic uttered for the second time finally reached my consciousness. This was Stalin himself before me—Stalin whose presence filled all of Russia but who kept himself secret except to a few. I sat down and stared fixedly at him. He looked neither as well preserved nor as imposing as he did in his official portraits. I tried to detect in his face some semblance of greatness, an indication of heroic will—but I was aware only of the large, flabby features, the sallow, pock-marked skin, the watery eyes.

How did he happen to be here? Why? What was this notebook in which I was mentioned? It all seemed unreal, like a nightmare: the strange, unbelievable environment, the en-

tangling web of circumstances, the presence of Stalin himself. . . .

Perhaps, I thought, it is fortunate for me that I have been thrust directly into Stalin's hands. This has its good side. At least I shan't be subjected to the mockery of the Chekists, the Soviet secret servicemen. Stalin will know how to get at the truth. He'll see things in their true light and dismiss me.

Here and now, in this very room, my fate would be determined. Over and over I reminded myself that I had nothing to fear, I was not guilty of anything, I had committed no crime. Above all, I must not get panicky. Stalin was human. He would know that I was innocent. I had only to behave calmly, like any normal person summoned by another for questioning. Should Stalin have any suspicions regarding me, I must dispel them—that was all.

*Untold number of times, in the years that followed, I was to relive this meeting with Stalin, recall every detail of the scene. The expressions on his face, the tone of his voice. The questions he put to me, my answers. Every word in that interchange was burned into my memory. The words may not always be exact but I think I have not distorted their meaning.*

"What did you say your name is?" Stalin asked, looking at me searchingly.

"Elizaveta Lermolo," I replied.

"Where are you from? . . . What is your occupation? . . . Where is your husband?"

I answered him as directly and plainly as possible, warning myself not to become excited. To the last question, I said, "I have no husband. I lost him in 1931."

He then wanted to know what my political affiliations had

been in the past, to which party I now belonged. I told him the truth, that I had never belonged to a party.

"Naturally," he replied with broad sarcasm. "All of you now call yourselves non-partisan. But in the old days you were undoubtedly a Kadet." In prerevolutionary Russia the Kadets or Constitutional Democrats were a major group in favor of a constitutional monarchy.

I explained that "in the old days" I was too young to take part in political activities.

"Then why were you exiled?"

Why? That was something I would like to know myself. I tried to keep my voice steady as I said, "To this day I haven't been notified officially. I was told at the time of my arrest, back in 1931, that I was being exiled because I was the wife of a convicted . . . former Czarist officer."

Stalin nodded. "So-o, you're the wife of a White Guard-Kadet? Now I understand. Well, in that case all you had to do was to renounce your husband as a counterrevolutionary, publish a notice to that effect, and you would have been in the clear."

Eagerly I replied that I had done just that—renounced my husband and secured a divorce. This surely would create a favorable impression on him.

Stalin turned to the deputy minister who was standing beside me. "Why, then, was she sent into exile?"

"Because," responded the minister, "this woman, having renounced her White Guard husband, nonetheless refused to prove by actual deed her allegiance to the revolution, although she was offered opportunities to do so."

This was an allusion to my persistent refusal to serve as an informer for the secret police.

"Is that right?" Stalin said, and there was a touch of re-

proach in his voice. "Well, you see it's your own fault. The Soviet government does not punish people without a reason. . . . But that's old business. What we are here for is something else. . . . You know Nikolayev pretty well, don't you?"

"Which Nikolayev?" I asked.

"What do you mean 'which Nikolayev'? The very same Leonid Nikolayev who frequently went to Pudozh on business, ostensibly to visit his aunt there."

"Oh, that one. Yes, I know him slightly."

"Fine, fine! In that case, tell me, please, where and when did you meet him? Who introduced you? Come—speak honestly, openly, like a Bolshevik. We must know every little thing."

My spirits rose. Now I was convinced that he was merely going to question me as a witness and then release me. I glanced out of the corner of my eye at the man sitting at the desk. He was still bent over his papers, busily writing. The deputy minister was standing by—calmly, expectantly. There was no sign that anything was amiss.

I shall be very brief and to the point, I thought to myself, and I summoned up all the courage at my command to recall truthfully events of the summer before. No one had introduced me to Nikolayev, I explained. I had seen him no more than two or three times—always in the kitchen I shared with other residents of the house. I certainly couldn't say that I knew Nikolayev well.

Stalin leaned toward me, resting his arms on the table, and I took courage from his rapt attention. I described carefully and in detail my first meeting with Nikolayev. It was in July, as nearly as I could remember. I had gone to the communal kitchen to prepare dinner when I saw a man stretched out on the floor having convulsions. Bent over him was an elderly

woman called Valentina Pavlovna who was trying to cover him with a newspaper. He lay there a while, then regaining control of himself he rose from the floor with a sort of sheepish smile on his face. Valentina Pavlovna and I helped him to a chair and tried to comfort him. I offered him a glass of skimmed milk, Valentina Pavlovna gave him some freshly cooked potatoes—which he accepted shyly and ate at once.

One of us, Valentina Pavlovna or I, asked him if he had any friends living in the house. He said he had, that his aunt, Christina Linkova, lived in apartment No. 7 and he had come from Leningrad to visit her. Then he introduced himself. He seemed embarrassed about the fit he had had. "So unpleasant," he said. After that he thanked us for the food and our kindness, and left. . . .

"That's how I met Nikolayev," I concluded.

"Where did he go after that?" asked Stalin. "Was it to his aunt's apartment, or to the city? . . . Go on."

I recalled that he had headed toward the garden. Where he went after that I did not notice, but the next day I saw Nikolayev again in the kitchen. He was cooking some sort of concoction made of cabbage and potatoes. "My aunt has gone to work," he explained, "and I have to prepare my own meal."

He ate at the table in the kitchen, without bread. I would have liked to offer him some of my bread, but it was near the end of the month and I had used up all my ration coupons.

At this point Stalin interrupted to say, "That's irrelevant. What did you talk about?"

While I was cooking my dinner and he was eating his, he had talked about himself. He seemed unhappy and eager to unburden his mind to someone. He worried that his attack of the day before had caused us bother. His nerves had been

acting up, he said. He'd been having a lot of trouble recently—family complications and difficulties with the party. A couple of months before he had been expelled from the Communist party for refusing to accept an assignment to work in the country. When I questioned him about the sort of work, he replied it had to do with the political propaganda administration of the MTS, or Motor Tractor Stations. (These are state agencies that lease equipment to collective farms.)

"Why didn't you accept?" I asked him. "It might not have been a bad post for you."

But he disagreed. "You yourself saw yesterday the condition of my health," he said. "How could I possibly go to some remote village, away from friends and relatives, where there is no doctor for hundreds of miles? I couldn't. But the Regional Committee wouldn't listen. Either you take on the assignment, they said to me, or we kick you out of the party."

I stopped to explain to Stalin that these might not be the exact words Nikolayev had used but they were close. Stalin nodded that he understood.

"Naturally," Nikolayev went on to say, "I refused to submit to such highhanded treatment and as a result I found myself expelled from the party." Later, however, the Central Committee reviewed his case and ordered his party book returned to him. However, they still refused him an assignment to his liking. "I don't propose to do any menial work," was the way he put it. "I'd be too humiliated before my comrades. After all, I've been a Red Partisan since 1918, a member of the Young Communist League, and a party member since 1924."

I believe those were the dates he gave me.

Few young men, he said, could boast of a better record than



his. Nevertheless, the Leningrad Regional Committee for some reason refused him an executive post.

In addition, he told me, he had family trouble. His wife and he had separated. "That's the state I'm in," he said, "without a job, without a family, sick and penniless, with no means to support myself, and no prospects for the future. Wherever I apply for a job, it's the same story—either they turn me down outright or they pass me on from one bureaucrat to another. The scoundrels are scared of the Regional Committee. They are, most of all, afraid of displeasing Kirov."

"To whom specifically," Stalin interrupted me again, "did Nikolayev apply for a job?"

"He didn't mention any names," I replied.

At this time Nikolayev could not make up his mind whether to go back to Leningrad or not. No one in Leningrad, he said, would be particularly glad to see him.

I didn't know what to say to him, and remarked perhaps tactlessly: "Don't get discouraged, young man. You are a Communist, and your party holds that there are no obstacles Bolsheviks can't surmount."

Nikolayev looked up at me wide-eyed. . . . It was then I noticed for the first time that he had very expressive eyes, despite his otherwise unattractive appearance. As I told Stalin, he was short, club-footed. His head was massive and he had protruding ears, a large mouth, and unusually long arms. A baggy, faded suit did nothing to improve him.

Stalin gestured me to stop. "These details are unimportant," he said. "I'd rather you told us how his story affected you. Wasn't this an extraordinary case? Here was a Communist, a Communist who had access to the topmost circles of the party. And his plight was an unusual one, under Soviet

conditions. Consequently, your reactions should have been unusual, too."

But I had seen too much of tragedy to be touched by Nikolayev's troubles. I did, however, say to him, probably out of politeness: "You should take care of yourself, young man. You are very ill."

"I know," he replied. "Doctors have told me that I must go to a sanatorium. But what can I do when I can't get a pass? The reason is that the passes are controlled by heartless bureaucrats who sit on their haunches in the trade union and party organizations." Things were different in the early years of the revolution, he said. "That was the golden era. The party membership was infused with a passion for self-sacrifice. There were loyal friendships, a desire to help one another, a spirit of comradeship. And now what? Everything has become bureaucratized."

"How very true," commented Stalin, seemingly agreeing with Nikolayev.

"Maybe. I wouldn't know about that," I said. I remembered that at the time I had felt he was being indiscreet. I decided that it would not be wise to listen to him any longer. And since I had finished cooking, I said good-by to him and returned to my room.

"That was wrong of you," Stalin said reprovingly. "You should have listened to him to the end, and given him advice on how to get out of his predicament. Clearly, this man was in need of moral support and you treated him with indifference. That was unkind."

"I was under the impression then," I explained, "that the only reason Nikolayev spoke so openly to me was because he mistook me for a free person."

"You think he didn't know that you were in exile? Non-

sense! Of course he knew," Stalin said in a voice that brooked no argument. Then he told me to go on with my story.

It was some time later that I again ran into the woman Linkova in our kitchen. She told me that Nikolayev had gone back to Leningrad. "He's a shiftless one," she said to me. "I can't understand him at all, he must have taken after his father." She repeated what he had told me, that his family life was none too happy. His wife was an Estonian, of a different faith, years older than he, and very homely. Moreover, she had an ugly disposition. Because she was afraid that the authorities might get after her if she continued to live with Nikolayev, she chased him out of the house. "Yes, the poor chap has his troubles," she finished. "But some of it is his own fault. He's a wild one. Instead of holding on to a job and minding his superiors, he's always griping about everything and everyone."

I paused.

"So what did you decide then?" Stalin demanded.

"I don't understand. What was I to decide? I merely listened to an old woman's chatter about her nephew, and that was all. I didn't give it much thought," I answered.

"You don't mean to say that your connection with Nikolayev ended there and then? I should think you would have been delighted to continue your acquaintance with such an important party member from Leningrad."

"I can't say that I was," I replied bitterly, before going on to describe my next meeting with Nikolayev.

I didn't see either him or his aunt for the rest of the summer. Then one day in September, returning from town, I noticed Nikolayev standing on the porch of our house, holding a book in his hand. He seemed calm, more self-confident. Apparently, I thought to myself, his affairs had improved.

"You're looking much better," I said to him. "I'm very sorry. Have you been to a health resort?"

"No," he replied, "I've been in Leningrad—didn't go any where. I was busy storming the feudal ramparts of bureaucracy at the Smolny." That was the way he phrased it. (The Smolny, or Smolny Institute, was in Czarist days a finishing school for daughters of the nobility. Since the Bolshevik revolution it has been used as the headquarters of the Communist party in Leningrad.)

When I looked confused, he repeated: "Those damned feudal ramparts of party bureaucracy."

I laughed, taking it all as a joke.

"So far my triumphs have been minor," he said glumly. "As a matter of fact, I haven't even made a dent. I was refused a pass to a sanatorium, denied any responsible position. What's more, they have refused to approve my application for study at an institution of higher learning."

I asked why.

"It's all the doings of that evil genius—Kirov!" he complained. "But the fortress will be taken, as the ancients used to say—and by means of an internal explosion. I'm on a firm course. I'm being guided by these glorious heroes." And he showed me the book he held which was about Perovskaya and Zhelyabov, revolutionary terrorists of the nineteenth century whose names were vaguely familiar to me.

To cover up my ignorance of them, I smiled and said, "That's good. Everything will turn out fine. You've had a difficult time, and now things are bound to get better for you."

I was about to go on to my room when he stopped me and broke into a long oration. It would be impossible to recall everything he said. Most of it, I didn't understand; it sounded

to me like the ravings of a madman. But many phrases have stuck in my mind. "I have ceased worshipping the idols of my youth. . . . Now I am taking a different road. . . . I now have an objective in life, a justification for my existence. . . . The heroes of this book made their mark in history. I, too, shall make a name for myself in history. You will remember me."

Stalin was clearly interested in this and questioned me as to its meaning, but I had no explanation to offer.

"Those were his words. What he had in mind I don't know."

While Nikolayev was talking, one of the tenants in the house, carrying a brief case, passed us on the porch. "There you have the typical representative of the provincial party bureaucrat!" Nikolayev exclaimed. "Only in the large cities his kind is even more vicious. They are monsters, tyrants. Where are the partisans who fought in the October Revolution? Gone! There is no trace left of the true comradeship forged in those bloody battles of 1917. You can't purify the Communist party through education. What is needed is a surgeon's knife. Better still, a revolver."

Stalin nodded approvingly. "Well said. Like a true Bolshevik. But go on."

Nikolayev talked on in the same vein. But I no longer listened. I could not concentrate. It was all very involved and tiresome. Fortunately, a woman acquaintance came out on the porch shortly and I used her as an excuse to break away from Nikolayev. That was the last I saw of him. Several days later, his aunt asked me to lend her two rubles to help pay for Nikolayev's railway passage back to Leningrad. "If you could possibly spare the money," she pleaded, "I'd appreciate it very much. The sooner he leaves the happier I'll be. The

Lord has certainly punished me! You can have as security a dozen spools of thread which my nephew Lenka brought from Leningrad. He thought he could trade them for food here. At any rate, I'm sure he'll send you the money when he gets to Leningrad."

"And you lent her the two rubles?" Stalin asked me.

"Yes, I did."

"And how long did it take Nikolayev to repay the debt?"

"I never did remind the old woman about it."

"What about Nikolayev?"

"Nor did I remind Nikolayev. As a matter of fact, I didn't know his address."

Stalin protested that this was impossible. "How is it he knew your address? He had it written out very clearly in his notebook." The illogic of this seemed to escape him. Obviously Nikolayev's aunt and I had the same address. "And besides you should have reminded Nikolayev," Stalin scolded me. "Debts should be honored. Didn't you need the money? Everyone needs money." Then he insisted upon my telling him the names of other people Nikolayev had met in Pudozh.

"I have no idea whom he met. I never saw him with anyone," I replied.

"You don't know, you say? But you know who Sergei Mironovich Kirov was?"

I said that I did.

"And you know that he is no longer alive?"

Yes, I knew that. It was broadcast over the radio.

"How did he die?" Stalin then wanted to know.

Sensing a trap, I said hesitantly, "He was killed by Nikolayev, wasn't he?"

"Yes. Kirov was slain by Nikolayev at the instigation of the enemies of the working class. Did you anticipate that the

friend you made in Pudozh would turn out to be such a scoundrel? Where did he get hold of the revolver? Do you know?"

"How should I?" I answered.

Turning to the deputy minister, Stalin asked him for a report on the weapon found on Nikolayev and was told that when Nikolayev was reinstated in the party no revolver was issued to him because he had no assignment which required one.

"In other words, Agranov," Stalin interrupted him, "to commit the murder Nikolayev obtained the revolver either from some Communist, or from the counterrevolutionaries. Right?"

"Quite right, Joseph Vissarionovich," replied Agranov.

"Is that clear to you, too?" Stalin turned to me.

I shrugged my shoulders, having no reason to confirm or deny what he conceived to be an obvious fact.

Again he questioned me about the weapon—had Nikolayev procured it from the Social Revolutionaries or the Zinovievites? (The Zinovievites take their name from Gregory Zinoviev, former head of the Communist International.) When I again disclaimed knowledge of the matter he addressed himself to the man at the desk.

"Poskrebyshev, be sure to remind me to issue an order to disarm all civilian Communists."

Stalin now regarded me closely. "You say you heard nothing about the revolver. Maybe so. But you certainly must have heard how the exiles felt about our late comrade Kirov?"

In reply, I told him of the talk I had heard about Kirov and his plans for reform.

"So-so? . . . If the exiles pictured Kirov as such a great

benefactor, why did they conspire to assassinate him? Why did they incite Nikolayev to kill Kirov?"

"Did the exiles incite Nilolayev? I didn't know that."

"Who else?" said Stalin. "Of course everyone now is trying to pin the blame on the Zinovievites. But perhaps the Zinovievites had nothing to do with it. . . . Tell me, do you think that it would be a good idea to abolish the NKVD, to liquidate the concentration camps, to enrich the peasants? And just who would benefit?"

I suggested that the entire population would benefit, and possibly the government.

"That's what you think? Good enough." Then after a pause he said, "When was it that the Zinovievites and the White Guardists decided jointly to eliminate Kirov?"

Keeping impatience from my voice, I explained that the White Guardists whom I knew in Pudozh had never in my hearing expressed any desire to assassinate Kirov. As for the Zinovievites and their type of Communists, I had had no contact with them.

Stalin was disbelieving. "Possibly you do not realize that some of the Communists you knew there belong to the Zinoviev faction. I'll name some of them: Katalynov, Levin, Mandelshtam, Shatsky, Miasnikov."

I knew none of these people, and said so.

"Strange," Stalin commented. "They seem to know you, and know you well. . . . Now let's approach the problem from another angle. As you know, Kirov had lately been getting rid of all loyal Communists in his party apparatus—men like Nikolayev—and replacing them with Zinovievites. How do you explain this odd behavior on Kirov's part?"

I did not know what to say. I was completely bewildered. Stalin, noticing my confusion and possibly understanding that



I could give him no help here, reverted to the subject of Nikolayev. I had told him nothing, he said, he did not know before. When I insisted that I had told all I knew, he suddenly capitulated.

"Very well. Let's assume for a moment that that is so. . . . Now, I should like to talk with you about something else. May I?"

The unexpectedly courteous manner heartened me. Maybe that is all he wants of me, I thought. He is not, after all, without understanding. Then I waited while he refilled his pipe, accepted a lighted match from Agranov, and took several drags.

"I see that you are a sensible woman," he said. "The fact that you do not subscribe to Marxian ideology may even be an advantage. For instance, let us assume that your Kadet party had seized power in Russia—improbable, but just for the sake of argument. Under such circumstances, the party leaders would realize the need to attract the support of the largest possible number of people in order to retain power. Right? What I want to know is: What specific measures, what reforms, would have the strongest appeal to the masses?"

I told him that I had never given much thought to such problems, that I doubted I could give an intelligent answer.

"You haven't thought about it, you say? Supposing you think about it now and tell me. It is a very interesting question. Many people on this planet have been breaking their heads over it."

I kept quiet. Stalin puffed on his pipe, but the fire had gone out. The obliging Agranov rushed over again with a lighted match. Stalin ignored him, put the pipe on the table, and looked penetratingly at me. Finally, he said: "Let's approach the problem in this manner. You are a political exile and you

have a good grasp of political realities. Supposing you were at the head of the state . . ."

"I hardly think it likely," I said with a wry smile. Agranov glared at me.

"You don't think that's a good example? All right, we'll take another. Let's assume that you are taking part in an important business enterprise, and this enterprise is prospering and growing. However, you notice that your erstwhile friends are trying to trip you up, and even cheat you, to the extent that the enterprise is suffering. Tell me, if you will, how would you deal with your so-called 'friends' under such circumstances?"

I suggested that in all probability I would try to break with them.

Exactly. Then why do so many people—including yourself, no doubt—disapprove of the banishment of Trotsky?

I had nothing to say to this.

"Were we right or not in banishing Trotsky?" Stalin persisted.

I looked up at him perplexed. His eyes were screwed on me. There was a ponderous silence and for a moment I seemed to lose all sense of time and space. The office we were in had suddenly shrunk, closed in on me. The world had narrowed to Poskrebyshchev-Stalin-Agranov. . . .

Why is he asking me these questions? What does he want from me? I wondered, close to panic.

"I am unprepared to answer your question," I said at last, a little testily. "Trotsky was not banished by me. You are in a better position to know."

"With whom do you sympathize more—with Trotsky or Zinoviev? And why?"

"I have no use for either Zinoviev or Trotsky," I exclaimed

now with considerable heat. "They don't interest me at all. I am much more concerned to know how soon I will regain my freedom. I have never committed any crime. I beg of you to order my immediate release."

Ignoring my excitement, Stalin went on to say that he and I had different concepts of what constituted guilt. "According to your viewpoint, the guilt lies only with Nikolayev, who shot Kirov. But according to my way of thinking, Nikolayev is not the sole culprit. Those who failed to take measures to prevent the assassination share his guilt. You, too, are guilty in part, because you didn't even try to foresee Nikolayev's crime, or attempt to dissuade him from it. Do you understand?"

I could feel ropes tightening around me. "Now, please," I protested, "wait a moment. How was that my obligation? What right did I, an exile, have to counsel him, a Communist? He had others to turn to—his own wife, for instance, who is a party member. Why should I, a total stranger . . ."

"That's not true. You were not a stranger to him. . . . Didn't it strike you as peculiar that Nikolayev, this degenerate character, did not complain about his 'hopeless plight' to any of our genuinely pro-Soviet people but instead chose to voice his complaints to you?"

Although I was distraught, confused, it did not escape me that Stalin was suddenly reversing himself. Only a moment before he had praised Nikolayev as a "true Communist"; now he was referring to him as a "degenerate character." Moreover, there was something ominous in the phrase "genuinely pro-Soviet people," which seemed to underscore my seclusion. My heart sank.

"No," I replied, "it never occurred to me. Why did he?"

Stalin made a sign to Agranov. "Explain to her later why Nikolayev appealed for sympathy to her."

I felt myself go cold all over. Was this it? Was I really to be indicted?

"Why later? When later?" I exclaimed in a voice that sounded strange to my own ears. "Please, explain it to me now, and release me!"

But Stalin said that there was not time—he had more important things to do. To Poskrebyshev, he observed, "Did you notice the new type of political exiles we have these days? They don't appear to be the least interested in current political problems. Not like those in our day. . . ."

Poskrebyshev nodded and continued writing. When Stalin turned to me again, there was hatred in his eyes. Staring straight at me, he said in a quiet, hostile voice: "You're masquerading. But it's all in vain, I assure you. We can see right through you. No one can pose these days as a non-political exile. Do you understand? Such tactics will never convince us that you have ceased to be a hardened enemy of the revolution." He shook his finger at me. "On the contrary, your evasive answers to the simple questions we put to you only strengthen our conviction that you are now, as you have always been, a confirmed foe of the working class."

"An enemy of the revolution" . . . "a confirmed foe" . . . Was that to be their verdict in my case?

In a somewhat calmer tone, Stalin went on to ask my opinion of banishment as a way of dealing with political criminals.

I replied that it did no good I could see—and offered personal indignities and enforced idleness as arguments against it. The wisest thing would be to return exiles to their families for the resumption of useful work.

Unexpectedly, Stalin chuckled. "I'm afraid that Agranov here would disagree with you." Agranov stirred, but did not say anything. "To be sure, he also believes that banishment, as a measure of social defense, should be abolished. But not for the reasons that you've given. He thinks that banishment could never transform political exiles into useful citizens of our motherland. Even young people like yourself resist re-education. Write that down," he said in an aside to Poskrebyshhev.

Calling upon my dwindling courage, I said hesitantly, "I can't understand what lack you see in me that makes you think I could never again be a socially useful person."

"Can't say you lack anything," said Stalin, looking me over suggestively and winking to Agranov. "But the fact is that you have never ceased to be an alien element to us. You have not become devoted to our cause, the cause of the revolution." To my suggestion that a place of exile was not the ideal environment for cultivating devotion, he replied, "Well, what did you expect us to do? Place you in some fashionable finishing school? . . . No, it's your own fault. If you were truly devoted to the welfare of the Soviet people and wanted to help them build a happier life for themselves, then nothing would have stopped you from doing so. Even under the most adverse conditions one can perform noble deeds. And there is the crux of the matter . . . you do not love your people, you do not wish them well, you do not love your country!"

"I beg your pardon!" I cried, pressed beyond bearing. "My people and my country I love and have always loved, though for seventeen years it has been drilled into my head that I am an enemy of the people. . . ." Then, unable to control myself longer, I broke into tears.

"Agranov, take her away!" Stalin ordered.

A transformation came over Agranov. Until now obsequious and pliant, he suddenly became stern and rigid.

"Stand up. Follow me," he commanded.

In a daze, not believing that my meeting with Stalin had ended so abruptly and so fatuously, I groped my way to the door.

Agranov let me into the corridor, saying, "Enough of that weeping. What are you trying to do, dampen the headquarters of the NKVD?" He directed the sentries to conduct me to my cell.

The elevator delivered us to the first floor, where pandemonium reigned. Guards were leading prisoners in and out of cells. From all sides, there were shouts, hysterical shrieks.

## *Chapter III*

A FEW HOURS LATER I WAS AGAIN TAKEN UP TO the fourth floor. Here, as before, there was a hushed stillness. The door to the office where I had been questioned was no longer guarded by sentries.

I was led into the room nearest the elevator, to find there a man lying on a cot under a white blanket. A bandage covered his forehead. Though his eyes were shut, his pale, motionless, emaciated face seemed familiar to me. Men in white coats hovered over him.

I looked about me, not understanding the reason for my presence here. Presently Agranov came over and propelled me toward the cot on which the injured man was lying.

"Here is something for you to admire," he said. "This is your work. Do you recognize the patient? That's your Leonid Nikolayev, the 'ugly freak' about whom you babbled to Joseph Vissarionovich."

My face crimsoned. I was consumed with shame and regret for having dwelt at such length upon Nikolayev's physical appearance during my questioning by Stalin.

The pale face below the bandage stirred with faint life. Nikolayev's eyebrows twitched, though his eyes did not open. I looked at him in silence, shaken and chagrined.

"This is what you did to a modest and honest Communist,"

continued Agranov in a stern tone. Then, addressing himself to Nikolayev, he said unctuously, "Here, my dear Nikolayev, is the woman who led you astray. If there is any manliness left in you, you'll know how to greet her—in the true Bolshevik fashion. She is the one who dragged you into the White Guardist swamp."

Nikolayev uttered no sound. Seemingly he was past hearing and I judged that he was being kept alive only by the ministrations of the men who stood ready with hypodermic syringe and other instruments in their hands.

After a few more venomous remarks directed at me, Agranov ordered the guards to take me back to my cell.

Then for a long period I was left alone. It seemed as if "they" had lost all interest in me. For three unending days and two sleepless, torturous nights, I remained in complete seclusion, alone in my solitary cell. . . . Dark thoughts alternated with bright expectations. My emotions seesawed between despair and hope.

Carefully I went over in my mind all that I had said to Stalin, reconstructing every detail of our extraordinary conversation. I recalled not only every word that was spoken, but also Stalin's gestures, the grimaces he made, the inflection of his voice.

Did he really suspect me of being involved in Nikolayev's crime?

I was sick with anxiety. Perhaps I had talked too much. There was no need for me to relate at such length my conversations with Nikolayev. . . . But on the other hand, if I hadn't spoken as openly and freely as I did, if I hadn't given Stalin all those details, it would have been harder for him to see that I was indeed innocent. I had held nothing back from him—surely he was aware of that. He had every reason to



order my release and have me returned to Pudozh—Pudozh, so cold, dreary, remote. Now it seemed like Paradise to me.

Another one and a half years and my term of exile would be ended. Somehow I'd manage to pull through. . . . There was even a possibility, I told myself, that when Stalin returned to Moscow and was reminded of me he would order my release at once . . . maybe free my husband too from the concentration camp. He could so easily do so. It was not as if we were guilty of any crime.

But if my innocence was obvious to Stalin, why was I still in jail? What did he mean by telling Agranov to explain to me "later" why Nikolayev had appealed to me for sympathy? And what could explain Agranov's vicious remarks and hostile tone? . . .

So my thoughts raced back and forth, around and around. "Dear Lord," I prayed, "I hope I've caused no trouble for my husband with my babbling." Certainly I had made it clear to Stalin that I had nothing to do with my husband. How had I put it? "I lost my husband in 1931." Yes, lost him. That was right.

We were legally divorced. We hadn't seen each other for three and a half years. I did not know for certain where he was and I was not even sure that he was still alive, although I was reasonably confident that my aunt would have known and informed me in the event of his death. Our only contact had been through her. Of course, in Pudozh I had kept nothing that would reveal my true feelings toward my husband—no photographs, no letters. I had learned that to destroy a letter immediately after reading it was a wise precaution for anyone under surveillance, no matter how innocent the contents.

In short, "they" had no reason to assume that I had not

"lost" my husband. All evidence pointed to the truthfulness of my statement.

In the middle of the night on December 6, I was awakened by a voice shouting above my head, "Get ready. You are wanted by the investigator."

I was taken to the fifth floor, into the office of the NKVD investigator Malinin who received me rather casually. His manner was agreeable, almost friendly.

"Well," he remarked amiably, "Comrade Kirov, the victim of that very strange terrorist act, has been laid to rest. It's all over—the funeral procession, the eulogies, the gun salutes. As they say, 'The dance is over, the lights are dimmed!' And now the time has come for the Chekists \* to do some spade work."

To a question from me he replied that Kirov had been buried in Moscow, within the Kremlin wall. He paused after that, then repeated that the time had come to get down to work, to track down all those involved "in this dastardly act." My case, he informed me, would be handled by him.

I asked what he meant by my case. "There is no case against me. I am merely waiting to be released."

"Oh, come, come! If Comrade Stalin himself found it necessary to question you, that means that you figure prominently in the affair."

I told him that I had no idea why Stalin had thought it necessary to interrogate me. I hadn't the least connection with the assassination of Kirov. Nor could I contribute anything material to the investigation. "How could I," I asked, "exiled in Pudozh, possibly know what went on in Leningrad? I am amazed that a great statesman like Stalin couldn't see that.

\* *Cheka*, a slang term referring to the NKVD, derived from the initials of the organization of secret police organized when the Bolsheviks first came to power. The members: Chekists.

Certainly he must have more important things to do than carry on idle conversations with women who have been inadvertently placed under arrest."

"'Idle conversations?' Oh, no! You don't know Comrade Stalin. Wasting time is not his custom." Malinin went on to say that Stalin always knew what he was doing. He was ever on guard, vigilantly defending the revolution. "Stalin has his own system, his own method for detecting the minutest counterrevolutionary tendencies in an individual. He detects them where no one else can.

"As a matter of fact," Malinin added, "Comrade Stalin would have made an excellent Chekist. We Chekists sense it in him. He is one of us body and soul. We understand each other without words. We have a common language, a common method. Do you know what I mean? In the most difficult periods, Stalin has come to the Chekists for help, and each time the Chekists have helped him. Many of his friends and comrades-in-arms have betrayed Stalin, but never has he been betrayed by a Chekist! And Stalin appreciates this."

With this introduction there began the long and tortuous series of interrogations to which I was subjected by the Chekists. Each day, shortly after one in the afternoon, I was summoned to the office of one or another of the NKVD investigators, to be grilled until five or six in the evening. Then, after "dinner," at about seven, I was taken to the investigator again and kept there until two or three A.M., sometimes till late morning. The hearings were frequently attended by silent spectators—such high Soviet officials as Kosyrev, Yezhov, or Vishinsky.

The person in charge of all the hearings was Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs Agranov. Moving from one office to another, he worked without rest ten to twelve hours a day,

cross-examining the accused, issuing instructions to the investigators. He was always dramatic, striking new poses, altering from moment to moment his techniques and moods.

Agranov and the investigators would swoop down on me like hawks: "No use pretending. We know everything. Don't try to stall, it won't do you any good."

Or they would laugh diabolically: "Nikolayev has told us everything. We know you like a book. We merely wanted to check your honesty. You have certainly shown yourself in a bad light. Now you have sung your swan song!"

Or they would threaten me: "We have been pampering you too long, and our patience is coming to an end. If you continue to be obstinate, we will have to resort to stern measures. You will regret it then, but it will be too late."

Or they would peer into my eyes, like hypnotists, and murmur: "A portrait of Trotsky turned up in the search of your room. Why did you keep Trotsky's portrait? . . . You can't possibly deny that Nikolayev maintained contact through you with a White Guard organization abroad, an organization known as the Cross of St. George? Despite your pretence of innocence, I can see deep in your eyes the traces of a horrid crime—the murder of Kirov. . . ."

Then suddenly: "How did Nikolayev inspire in you this passionate love for him? Where did you hide the letters he sent you? You still haven't told us how much money you received from him. . . . Tell us who sent you that small, heavy parcel last August—remember? . . ."

And so it went from day to day incessantly, the same questions, innuendoes, and threats.

The presence of spectators did not ordinarily faze Agranov and he would carry on with an air of self-assurance. But there was one spectator who visibly perturbed him. That was Yez-

hov, who was later to become chief of the NKVD. At the appearance of Yezhov, Agranov would frown, become momentarily distracted. Soon, however, he would regain his composure, resume the old pose, and continue to roar: "You can't escape the wrath of the working class! Why don't you tell the truth? With whom was Nikolayev associated in the Finnish Consulate? We Bolshevik-Chekists are not accustomed to dilly-dallying. We take the bull by the horns. Speak up! Who in your White Guard organization ordered you to demoralize Nikolayev?"

The investigators would occasionally write something out and hand it to me to sign. But I refused to sign anything. This enraged them to the point of cursing and threatening me. Still, so long as any spectators were present, they did not resort to force.

During the first few hearings I was shocked and upset. I reacted violently, calling the investigators liars, torturers, and other unflattering names. But later on I refused to let anything they said provoke me. I sat still, listened to their ravings, and from time to time would utter an emphatic "No." Occasionally, I heard a commotion, shrieks or groans coming from a neighboring investigator's office. This would frighten me but it would also, oddly enough, strengthen my determination not to sign any "confession."

So it went on for almost three weeks. During that period I was questioned by no fewer than sixteen investigators. I managed to learn every fine point in the Nikolayev case. Actually, I was more perfectly informed than my investigators, who often confused names and even had trouble in keeping the "facts of the case" straight. I knew by heart the names of all the accused, the nature of the charges against them, what activities they had allegedly engaged in, which of the accusa-

tions they had admitted and which they had denied. I knew who denounced whom and on what grounds. But I never saw any of my "accomplices" in the case. Apparently, there were no witnesses in the case at all. Everyone was a defendant.

Once I was taken to a new investigator, a man by the name of Ignatenko. He greeted me in the same off-hand manner as the others. Our conversation went something like this:

"Tell me about the work you performed with Nikolayev."

"I never performed any work with Nikolayev, for the simple reason that he had no work. As you know, he was unemployed."

"I have in mind a different kind of work. Not legal, useful work, but the sort of work that is known as underground counterrevolutionary activity."

"I have never engaged in work like that, neither with Nikolayev nor with anyone else."

"What about your work with Katalynov?"

"I know of no one by that name."

"You never saw him? Too bad. Then why did you communicate with him?"

"I never communicated with him."

"Never, eh? Well, you know, my friend, that doesn't sound very convincing. And when did you see Zinoviev last? . . . What do you mean you never saw him? Your own testimony shows that you saw him regularly."

I pointed out that I could hardly see regularly a person who lived a thousand miles away from me, when I had no right to be more than two miles away from my place of exile. Pudozh is in the remote north, while Zinoviev was in Moscow.

"So-o. You have decided to deny your associations with Nikolayev, Katalynov, and Zinoviev. That will serve no pur-

pose, believe me. It merely places you in a more difficult position. I am amazed about one thing: What sense is there in your refusing to confess? Wouldn't it be better if you told the truth? It so happens that the consul who gave you the money for Nikolayev has told us everything. He told the whole story before he left the Soviet Union. I have his sworn statement. If you want me to, I shall be glad to read you the passage that pertains to you."

"You can read it if you wish, but whatever it says it is entirely fictitious."

"It is not in the least fictitious," Ignatenko contradicted me. "Reading it, you will see how much we know about you, you will realize how seriously you are implicated. After that you may go back to your cell. I advise you to think things over carefully. You can still make amends before it is too late. Otherwise you know what's in store for you—'liquidation.' And I shouldn't like to see that happen."

Unexpectedly Ignatenko changed the subject. "Why is it that you can't look me straight in the eye? Does your conscience bother you?" With that, he pulled his pistol out of the holster and placed it on the desk before him. "Look straight into my eyes. Don't turn your eyes away. Don't blink."

He peered at me, straining every muscle. The veins in his forehead swelled from the concentration. I took his behavior as an awkward joke. It hadn't the least effect on me. He must have sensed my disdainful attitude and realized that his efforts had failed, for he rose to his feet after a minute and said gruffly, "Well, anyway, I have no more time to waste on you today. We'll continue in the morning."

The following day, at ten, the interrogation was resumed.

"It is necessary to straighten out certain facts," Ignatenko began. "First of all, when did you introduce Katalynov and Nikolayev to the Latvian consul? Where, in what city, did this meeting take place?"

"You mean, of course, the Finnish, not the Latvian, consul," I corrected him.

"Very well, let it be as you say, the Finnish consul."

I had answered that question scores of times. Never had I seen any consul, nor could I possibly have seen one. I told him so.

"You deny it? Then who introduced you to Zinoviev, Mrachkovsky, and Bakayev?"

Again I stated the simple truth—that I had never known or even seen any of the people he mentioned.

Impatiently Ignatenko shouted at me: "I wish you'd get this into your skull: the longer you persist in refusing to tell the truth, the worse it will be for you. Don't you realize that we know everything? All we want to do is test your honesty and establish to what extent you have purged yourself of your hostile attitudes toward the Soviet Union. It is to your own interest not to procrastinate any longer. All I ask you to do is to clear up some of the points in the evidence, and to sign these four depositions. Once you have done that, you will be released. You can name any small town in Russia where you would like to reside permanently. We will provide you with a free railroad ticket, bid you good-by, and close your case, once and for all."

This identical proposal had been made to me by all the other investigators.

"I have not signed and shall not sign any depositions," I replied wearily. "There is not a word of truth in them."

Ignatenko flared up at this and pressed a button on his desk. An inspector appeared at the door.



"Remove the chair," Ignatenko directed him. "She wants to stand a while."

The inspector pulled me to my feet, and took the chair out of the office.

"Stand there, with your face to the wall," Ignatenko barked. "You will remain like that until you come to your senses and realize that you must tell the whole truth. . . . You have until six in the morning to make up your mind, not a moment later," he added ominously.

I stood facing the wall, and lowered my head. Ignatenko busied himself with the papers on his desk. I could hear the scratching of his pen. Otherwise there was complete silence in the room. Now and then he had callers—his fellow investigators. They engaged in shop talk, bragged about their success in making people "loosen their tongues"—so and so had been put on the "conveyor" and had "broken" on the third day, someone else had finally requested to be relieved from "standing," et cetera, et cetera.

They munched fruit, drank coffee, while I stood with my back toward them, like an inanimate object, like some raw material that they had to work on. But I was resolved to prove too tough for them.

"Aren't you tired of standing? Perhaps you have thought up something interesting that you would like to tell me?" Ignatenko would inquire from time to time. "No? Very well, stand a while. Maybe you will think of something."

Lunch was brought in. I ate it standing. Later, some hours later, they brought me a cup of ersatz coffee, instead of dinner. I continued to stand. By then I felt a sharp pain in my legs. I wanted to sit down or, at least, to walk around the room a bit. But the slightest stir on my part would call forth

a bellow from Ignatenko: "Don't you dare move! I'll shoot you down like a dog!"

Night approached. I remained standing in the same spot. My legs were numb, my thighs felt inflamed. I had excruciating pains in my heels, at my waist, in the nape of my neck. My heart was pounding, everything seemed to grow dark before my eyes. I couldn't lift my feet from the floor, couldn't shift my weight from one foot to the other. At times I'd doze off and the upper part of my body would rock a bit. Then Ignatenko would rouse me by striking a ruler on his desk.

In the late hours of the night, Ignatenko summoned a man I judged to be one of his superiors.

"Look at her," he said to the visitor. "How do you like this counterrevolutionary wench! She has been standing motionless like this for sixteen hours and hasn't uttered a word that would indicate any change of heart. She supposedly doesn't know anyone, hasn't done anything; refuses to sign any affidavit; stands there like a lifeless statue. . . . Hey, you, what are you moving for? Stand still! You can move only in one direction—toward my desk, when you're ready to sign."

. . . In the morning, I was lifted from the floor, revived, and then helped to my cell. My legs, from the balls of my feet to my knees, were inflated and soft like rubber pillows. I could hardly move them. . . . I slept till evening. After dinner, I was taken back to Ignatenko.

He was pacing the floor nervously, his brow wrinkled. He had an annoyed, hang-dog look.

"Today, I must wind up your case. The chief won't tolerate any further delays. So I have briefly summarized your testimony on this single sheet of paper. Read it and sign it. I've looked out for your best interests in drafting the document.

All extraneous matters have been deleted. What's left is nothing that you could possibly take exception to. Read it."

I glanced at the sheet of paper, read the opening lines, saw the words ". . . I admit my guilt in . . ." and exclaimed flatly: "I shall not read it, and shall not sign it. I am not guilty of anything."

"So that's your attitude, you White Guard bitch. We'll see about that. Before I'm through with you, you'll beg me to let you read and sign it. I'll tear you to pieces." And he cursed me some more.

In response to a pressed button, the inspector appeared. They whispered. The inspector grew tense.

"Get her out of here!" shouted Ignatenko.

The inspector pointed to the door. I headed toward it. Suddenly, at the moment when, dragging my heavy feet, I was about to cross the threshold, Ignatenko grabbed my left hand, forced it into the crack between the door frame and the door, and yelled to the inspector, "Shut the door!"

My fingers snapped . . . the pain was excruciating . . . I let out a shriek and threw myself against the door to open it. But Ignatenko continued to pull the door toward him.

"Help! Save me!" I screamed into the corridor, then lost consciousness.

I came to, lying on the floor, drenched to my skin. The inspector was pouring water on me from a large pitcher.

"You'd yell, would you, you damned bitch!" fumed Ignatenko from above me. "I'll show you how to yell. A gentle little creature, aren't you? And delicate! . . . What in hell are you doing lying there, glaring at me? Get up and sign the paper."

When I refused, he ordered the inspector to drag me to the door. At this I jumped up, rushed to the door, swung it

open, and yelled into the corridor with all my might: "Help! Help! Save me!"

The inspector grabbed me and pulled me back into the center of the room while Ignatenko roared in mounting fury. He then struck me in the face with his fist, full force. Blood gushed from my mouth and nose. . . . To my horror, I discovered that several of my teeth were knocked out. . . . Without realizing what I was doing, I seized a large glass inkwell from the desk and hurled it in his face.

Splattered with ink, Ignatenko threw himself at me, pounded my head with the butt of his gun until he knocked me off my feet. As I lay on the floor, he kicked me with his booted feet. I screamed, straining the last reserve of strength within me. . . .

Chekists from nearby offices ran into the room and picked me up. Covered with blood, my clothes torn to shreds, I was taken back to my cell. There I lay the remainder of the night, in horrible pain, bleeding in a dozen places. It was not until some time next morning that a doctor finally appeared to treat my wounds.

The rest of the day went by without an interrogation. Then in the middle of the night I was summoned again. It must have been about two o'clock when I was led into a large office where a woman in Chekist uniform sat at the investigator's desk taking notes. Seated opposite her was a tall blond young man of about thirty, tired looking and unshaven. He had a manly, handsome face which bore marks of a recent beating. There were dark-blue scars on his forehead and under his ears. Occupying a leather couch at one end of the office were three figures now familiar to me: Vishinsky, Agranov, Yezhov.

As I entered eyes turned toward me.

"Do you know this person?" the woman Chekist asked,

pointing to the young man, who had not moved or shifted his attention.

"No. I never saw him before," I answered.

"Try to recall. What did Nikolayev say to you about Katalynov?"

I said that Nikolayev had not mentioned his name to me.

She turned to the young man. "Katalynov, do you recognize this woman?"

"No," he replied, "I've never met her."

Someone on the couch, it may have been Vishinsky, interrupted: "Katalynov, tell us what Nikolayev said to you about an exiled woman in Pudozh, a woman named Lermolo."

"Nikolayev didn't say anything about her."

It was at this point, I believe, that Agranov broke up the interview. "Comrade Mirova," he called to the woman Chekist, "who could possibly identify this bloodstained, bandaged, limping hen as Lermolc? You will have to scrub her first, have her put on some make-up, before you show her to those she lured into her White Guard nest. Let her go till tomorrow."

I never saw Katalynov again. But somehow his personality left a deep impression on me. . . . Five years later I was to learn more about him from the Chekist woman Mirova, who by then had become a political prisoner herself. Ivan Katalynov, she told me, was subjected to greater physical torture than any of the fourteen men who were executed on December 29, 1934, as alleged accomplices in the Kirov assassination.

My confrontation with Katalynov was the first of a series. During the next few nights I was brought face to face with numerous other defendants in the Kirov case. These interviews, as I recall, nearly always followed the same pattern.

Investigator: "Defendant Myasnikov, look at this woman.

Whom did she introduce you to in the White Guard underground?"

Defendant: "I don't know this woman. I never saw her before."

Investigator: "You are lying. We know that you met her many times, that you received orders from her. She transmitted money to you from the Finnish consul. We know all about it. You might as well admit it. It won't do you any good to deny it."

Then the investigator would turn to me: "You remember Myasnikov, don't you? You should. You wrote to him often enough."

"No," I would reply. "I don't know this man. I never corresponded with him. I never saw him in my life."

Then Agranov would drag me away to some other hearing. "Come along," he would say. "I'll show you off to your other clients."

During one night, it was the night of December 27, I was subjected to a half-dozen confrontations. Most of the defendants were barely alive, they had been beaten to a pulp. They would look at me wearily, with bloodshot, expressionless eyes and assert in their weak voices that they had not known me and had never had any dealings with me.

The next day I had a respite, there was no hearing. This gave me time for reflection. I went over carefully in my mind the grillings of the last few days, and reached the optimistic conclusion that the prosecuting authorities had failed to establish a case against me. Hard as they had tried, they were unable to uncover the slightest evidence involving me in the assassination plot. None of the defendants had testified against me, or implicated me in any way.

"With God's help, I shall be released, despite the efforts of Agranov and Ignatenko!"

That evening I had a visitor—an important-looking official who was accompanied by an entourage of uniformed men.

"Do you have any questions you'd like to put to me?" he inquired.

"Questions? What questions?" I asked, dazed.

"In that case, you apparently have no questions," he said, and was about to leave.

"Oh, yes, I do! I have a request," I hastened to say in an effort to detain him. "I should like to see the state prosecutor. I want to lodge a complaint with him . . . against investigator Ignatenko . . . who tortured and beat me during the interrogation."

"Stop making up tales," I was told. "Besides, the prosecutor is too busy to see you."

"Then let me have paper and ink. I shall put the complaint in writing. I want to protest the bestial treatment I received at the hands of investigator Ignatenko."

"It will do you no good. You ought to be thankful that you weren't confined to a punitive cell for your insolent attitude." With that, the official stalked out, followed by his retinue.

Late at night, December 29-30, a prison matron came into my cell and shook me out of sleep or, more correctly, out of a sort of semidormant state I had fallen into.

"Get into these quickly," she said, and handed me a long nightgown and a pair of bedroom slippers.

In her presence, I changed my clothes. When I had finished, all I had on were the gown and slippers plus a bandage on my head, and another bandage on my left hand. The

matron looked me over carefully and ordered me to follow her.

"Where are you taking me in this attire?" I protested. "What kind of farce is this?"

"I have no idea," she replied grimly. "Perhaps to the doctor for a check-up. . . . Come along now, let's go."

She took me up to the fourth floor and into the same office where I had been questioned by Stalin. My first thought was: *He has decided that I am innocent. . . . He will now order them to release me!*

But Stalin was not there. The office was filled with other people: Stalin's seat was now occupied by Vishinsky; alongside him sat Agranov and several high-ranking Chekist officers in uniform; the investigator Malinin was in the chair I had occupied; and presiding at the desk, where formerly Poskrebyshv had sat, were Voroshilov, Ulrich (Chairman of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR), and Yezhov. Spread before them on the desk were several dossiers and sheets of writing paper.

Panic-stricken, I shrieked and made for the door, but the matron and one of the Chekist guards pulled me back and forced me into the center of the room. All the men riveted their eyes on me.

"Do you plead guilty as charged?" Ulrich demanded in a booming voice.

I could not speak. Words would not come out. I merely shook my head.

"You don't plead guilty? Why?" he went on. "How are we to understand your refusal to sign any of the protocols of the preliminary hearings?"

Somehow I managed to say that I had refused to sign the



protocols because they were false and not based on my testimony. And again I declared my innocence.

Vishinsky broke in to say that the protocols were in complete accord with the depositions I had made. It was possible, he conceded, that in the summarizing of my testimony some inaccuracies may have crept in. But that did not justify my refusal to sign.

"You may, if you wish," he offered, "insert some reservations. But the protocols must be signed."

Agranov leaped out of his seat and rushed toward me with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"You still have time to change your mind," he said in what was meant to be an ingratiating voice. "Sit down here now and sign the protocols, with, of course, whatever modifications you want to make."

"I shan't sign anything," I cried out. "I am not guilty of anything."

My refusal to admit my guilt, Ulrich said, would not help me. It only confirmed their conviction that I was an unreconstructed enemy of the revolution and of the Soviet people.

Through tear-filled eyes I noticed that Ulrich had now turned to Voroshilov and Yezhov, and that the three were quietly conferring. . . . Presently, Ulrich motioned to Malinin to take me into the corridor.

At the door, as I looked up at Malinin, I observed him grinning at me.

I remained in the corridor about ten minutes, guarded by two sentries. I could barely keep from sobbing. I felt hurt and humiliated, frustrated by my inability to cite a single bit of conclusive evidence that would disprove once and for all the charges against me. I had not, I realized, succeeded in estab-

lishing my innocence. I had been overpowered and crushed by an inhuman something against which I was powerless.

At last, Malinin emerged from the office. "Take her to the same place," he said to the sentries, handing them some document.

The sentries led me away, in a direction opposite from the elevator which had brought me. We walked along the corridor for a long while, until we came to another elevator which carried us down to the first floor. There the sentries surrendered me and the document was given to a tall, stout man in Chekist uniform whose chest was covered with medals and decorations. He looked at me, looked at the document, then pressed a doorbell. Out of the huge, iron door appeared another Chekist. He read the document, signed it, and propelled me through the opened iron door, down the stairs, into the cellar.

The corridor in the cellar was brightly illuminated. The walls were padded with a gray, quilted material. From one of the rooms came drunken voices, and as we passed I saw a group of tipsy Chekists sitting at a table laden with bottles and food; other Chekists were sprawled out on divans. We walked on quickly. Through the open door of the next room I noticed, in passing, a table with revolvers scattered on it. There were no people in that room.

At the end of the corridor, my escort opened a door and stepped aside silently to afford me a better view. I looked in and nearly fainted.

On the floor of a large, brightly lighted room, piled one on another, in grim disarray, were blood-soaked bodies with crushed skulls and distorted faces. There must have been a hundred of them. At the other side of the room was a door opening into a courtyard. Through this door four stalwart

Chekists were carrying out the lifeless bodies on stretchers. The place was bitter cold. It seemed to me that one of the corpses with a bandaged head stirred and groaned. I heard—or maybe I only thought I heard—someone fire a pistol shot. . . .

How I got out of the place I do not know. All I remember is hearing someone remark contemptuously, "A squeamish little bitch, isn't she?" I came to in my cell. The matron had brought back my clothes. With her help I changed into them. My body was still shaking.

"Well, did the doctor cure you?" she asked. "We call this treatment DSC." \*

"What does that mean?"

"You'll find out. There is plenty of time. You can't expect to learn everything at once."

\* Death Sentence Commuted.

## *Chapter IV*

NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1935, WAS MARKED BY THE issuance of ten cigarettes to each prisoner, and the serving of hot soup. We also received rye bread, instead of the usual black bread.

The prisoners were ecstatic. Someone scrawled on the wall: "The soup was fine, but it sure made me ill." To which someone else added: "You're just not used to good soup!"

During the night of January 4, another series of interrogations was started. These dealt with new, so-called "high-placed state criminals"—the Zinovievites. The investigators spoke of the political duplicity of these men, how they formed a terrorist underground organization, how they incited Nikolayev to assassinate Kirov. I was urged to confess that I had ensnared the Zinovievites and other unstable Communists into the White Guard movement.

The personnel of the investigating staff changed. Of my former interrogators, only Malinin remained.

One day while in his office I noticed on the desk a copy of the newspaper *Pravda* which carried a report on the execution of the fourteen defendants in the Kirov case—Nikolayev, Katalynov, Myasnikov, et al.

The newspaper was so placed on the desk that I could read it easily. Malinin was engaged in some work and ostensibly

paid no attention to me. Eventually, though, when it was obvious that I had finished, he removed the newspaper from the desk. When I looked up at him questioningly, he shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "That's that." I felt sick at heart.

The hearings continued for days and days. They were at once offensive and tiresome. Direct examinations alternated with confrontations. It was the same thing over and over again. Total strangers accused of being my "accomplices" all denied knowing me, and I in turn denied knowing them. It must have been abundantly clear to the investigating authorities that I was in no way involved in the Zinoviev case. Yet, they would not release me.

My last interrogation convinced me that they were fully aware there was not a shred of evidence against me. I was summoned before a top-ranking Chekist who greeted me in a brusque, business-like manner.

"Your case has dragged on much too long," he said. "Let's not waste any more time. It won't do you any good to play dumb. You might as well decide to be truthful and sincere. You can't conceal the truth from history, you know."

*The more important they are, the more they bluster and lie,* I thought to myself as I looked him straight in the eye.

"It may interest you to know," he went on, "that the consul who financed Nikolayev, Katalynov, and you has been expelled from the Soviet Union. . . . You are sorry to hear it? You need not be. He was the one who betrayed you. Actually, he wasn't too bad a chap, but he got involved in matters that were not his concern. . . ."

In explanation, the Chekist said that he and the consul had had a farewell drink before the latter's departure—"And he told me everything about you. . . . So you see, I know all.

Why don't we stop playing cat and mouse, and wind up the case to our mutual advantage?"

I answered him testily to the effect that the mythical consul certainly made lots of friends. "I'm getting awfully bored with all of you quoting him to me. Why don't you release me? I've spent enough time here."

"All right. I'll release you. But on the condition that you tell the entire truth: First, when and how did you meet Zinoviev? Second, whom did you introduce to the Latvian consul? Third, how much money did he disburse through you?"

I could only reply wearily: "Oh, it's the same old thing again. Really, I have nothing to say to you, and you know it."

On the evening of January 17, I was transferred to a large cell crowded with women of all ages and from all walks of life. As I entered, they flocked around me with questions:

"In which case are you involved? Have they told you what your sentence is?"

There was not a familiar face among them. I decided to be very cautious in my replies.

The cell stewardess (in Russia, by tradition that goes back to Czarist days, the occupants of a prison cell elect an "elder" or "steward") cleared a place for me on the floor beside her. Entering my name on the cell list, she said: "So you are Lermolo! I've certainly heard a lot about you. How they railed against you, especially Vishinsky and Agranov. I pictured you to be quite different. You were described as . . . But never mind." Then she told me, to my intense interest, that she was Leonid Nikolayev's sister—Katya Rogacheva.

Studying her, I decided that she did resemble him a good deal—the same blue eyes, the same large mouth and long arms. A brown-haired woman of about forty, she was very

talkative and vivacious. She wanted to know whether I had been taken to see her brother Leonid, whether I had met her other brother, Pyotr Nikolayev. "You must have known my aunt in Pudozh, Christina Linkova," she added. "She's here somewhere, but I haven't run into her yet. Some old lady died at one of the hearings. It may have been she, for all I know."

She paused, but only for a moment. "I'm told that you and Milda were the only women questioned by Stalin."

I asked her who Milda was, and learned that she was the wife of Leonid (the family called him by his pet name Lenka) Nikolayev. "There she is, standing aside from the others. A surly, hateful creature, Milda Drauleh. She was a stenographer at the regional headquarters of the party."

Then Katya pointed out to me in turn her sister Anya Pantiukhina; her brother Pyotr's wife, Maksimova-Nikolayeva; and, beyond them, her mother. "How she has suffered, poor thing!"

Katya's incessant chatter soon put me to sleep.

The next day Katya reported that in the morning while washing up she had learned that all those arrested in connection with the Kirov and Zinoviev cases were soon to be transferred to other jails.

"Our cases," she explained, "have already been completed and there is no reason for us to be kept any longer in this preliminary jail."

"How do you mean 'completed'?" I said.

"Just that. They've found out all they wanted to know and they don't need us any more."

There was a chorus of exclamations. "They don't need us? Then why do we have to be transferred to other jails?"

*One must assert oneself, I decided. I am going to petition*

for my immediate release. But when I asked Katya how I could obtain paper and ink in order to draft a letter of complaint, she advised me not to upset myself, saying, "I talked with a friend of mine here, a woman who works for the NKVD. She told me that I ought to consider myself lucky to be in one piece. People are being shot left and right."

When I still insisted, however, she agreed to get me some writing paper from the floor warden.

Later, the inmates of our cell were taken for a walk in the courtyard, but as it was unusually cold outdoors I decided to forego the "breath of fresh air." In consequence I found myself alone with Nikolayev's aged mother, who did not feel up to exercising and had also stayed behind. We fell into conversation.

"How disgraceful this is," she remarked, looking about the deserted and dismal room. I never thought I'd find myself in a jail. It's a good thing that my late husband, Vassily, didn't live to see it."

The old woman was as talkative as her daughter. Within a short time I learned that her husband had been a good man, but jealous. Jealousy drove him to drink, and drink in turn made him ferocious. He fought with her, beat the children: "He took a particular dislike to our sickly Lenka," she recalled. "Once he struck him so hard on the head that the little fellow collapsed. Ever since then Lenka has suffered from epileptic fits. He remained in a cast until his seventh year. As God is my witness, I feared that the child would be a cripple for life. But in time his condition improved somewhat."

At her husband's death she was left with three children to support—Katya ten, Lenka three, and Pyotr, who was still nursing. She was working at the time as a cleaning woman at



the streetcar barn, but as her earnings were meager she took on an additional job, as housekeeper for a Finnish baron.

"The baron," she said, "was a fine man, and very kind to me. . . . And so it came about that in 1909 I gave birth to his child, Anya. She is here with me now. Have you seen her? Did you notice how beautiful she is? The very image of her father." Anya had character and ability as well as beauty, the woman added with pride—but, alas, the Lord had not blessed her with good fortune.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, the baron fled to Finland. Katya, who had been apprenticed to a tailor, joined the party and married a Red commander. Lenka enlisted in the Red Guard, though he was barely fourteen. Her older children, she explained, did not go much for learning, but the younger ones, Pyotr and Anya, were good students. When Anya was about to graduate from the secondary school, someone sent a report to the OGPU accusing her of having deceived the Young Communist League by concealing her social origin. The charge was that Anya was not the daughter of a worker as she had claimed; that she was born two years after her so-called father died; that her real father was a baron, a member of the bourgeoisie.

"Naturally, I was summoned to the OGPU," the woman said. "I tried at first to deny everything, but that did no good. A fact is a fact."

So Anya was thrown out of the Young Communist League. The following year she tried to enroll in the Art School, but was turned down because she did not belong to the party and was not of proletarian origin.

"The only thing to do was to marry her off to someone in the provinces. Well, my Anya made a good marriage at that.

She married an engineer—to be sure, a non-party engineer, but an engineer nonetheless.”

The old woman sighed. I tried to comfort her. “Imagine,” she said, “it was only about a year ago that I was named a Heroine of Socialist Labor.” She told me how she was awarded a medal and a citation for thirty years of exemplary work at the streetcar barn. The presentation was made at a special ceremony in the workers’ club.

“There were guests from many government bureaus. They shook my hand and praised me. When the turn came for me to sign some book, I was so flustered that I had forgotten how to write my name and absent-mindedly scrawled three crosses. You should have heard them laugh! But somehow I was in no mood for laughter. I went home and wept all night. Katya kept asking me, ‘Why are you crying, Mother? You are now a heroine of our happy fatherland. You ought to rejoice.’

“But what was there to rejoice about? When these big party bosses gave me the medal, they all praised me for my thirty years of work and said that they hoped I would continue to work as well in the future. If only someone had said, ‘Thank you, Maria, you have worked enough in your life, now go rest and live in peace.’ But no, not a one of them said that. All I heard was: ‘You worked, you are working, you will continue to work!’”

She was silent a minute, then leaned over to me. “It’s good to have someone to talk with who is not one of these Godless Communists,” she whispered, patting my arm. “I am naturally a religious woman.”

She talked some more—about religious observances of Old Believers like herself; about her grandchildren, Lenka’s children, whom she had had rechristened in church secretly. After

a while our cellmates returned from their walk. Upon seeing Katya, the old woman turned to her.

"Tell me, child, what are those Zinovievites? And why do all these young upstart investigators keep saying that I am one? 'We made you a Heroine of Socialist Labor,' they say to me, 'because we considered you a true and honest proletarian woman. But what do you do? You fill the piano with crosses, and baptize your grandchildren. That means you are a treacherous Zinovievite.' They say I betrayed the party, that I brought up my children to pose as Communists while plotting to kill our leaders, that I helped Lenka plan the assassination of Kirov. How much money did I receive from the Finnish consul? they ask me. Where did I hide the money? Who were Lenka's accomplices? And so on, and so on, without end."

Katya paid no attention to her mother, and the old woman went on talking to me, recalling what she had said to Agranov and Agranov to her before they took her into town and ransacked her apartment, taking away all sorts of religious emblems and keepsakes she had treasured.

"Naturally, I am not a literate woman," she confided. "They had written out more papers, they asked me to sign them. Wherever they told me to, I put my mark—two crosses or three crosses, as required . . ."

Then she turned again to Katya, with reproach in her voice. "I begged you so many times, daughter, to lend Lenka money to go to a doctor. He could have been cured. With God's help, everything would have turned out well. Oh, Katya, Katya . . ." And she broke into tears.

Within the next few hours I made the acquaintance of most of my cellmates. I was particularly interested in the members of Leonid Nikolayev's family. His younger sister,

Anya Pantiukhina, in no way resembled the others. There was something truly aristocratic about her bearing. She was tall and graceful, had thick blond hair, bright hazel eyes fringed by long lashes, a rosy complexion, and nicely shaped legs and hands.

It was easy to engage her in conversation when I suggested that from her appearance I would judge her to belong to the world of art. No, she said, she was neither actress nor artist, although she had taken part in amateur theatricals and had dreamed at one time of entering the Fine Arts Institute in Leningrad. She and her husband had been arrested six weeks ago in Kungur, a small provincial town beyond the Urals where he was employed as an engineer.

"Since then the NKVD inquisitors have been probing our souls," she said, taunting her about her "noble" descent and trying to force her to confess that she had maintained illegal connections with the Finnish consul and had been in contact with her natural father in Finland. "In the end, I could bear it no longer and decided to commit suicide. But, to my sorrow, they managed to prevent me. Then five days later they led me to my execution."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

She explained that she was taken to the prison cellar into a room where all sorts of pistols were on display. The guard asked her, "What kind of revolver do you like?" When she didn't reply, he wanted to know, "And what kind of revolver did you get for that assassin brother of yours?" Then, growing impatient with her silence, he ordered her, "In that case, pick out the revolver you'd like to be shot with."

Her flesh was creeping. Still she did not utter a sound. Then the guard took her down the corridor and opened a door to a room filled with dead bodies. "Perhaps you'd like to

go in here," he said. At this point she lost consciousness and dropped to the cold floor.

I told Anya that I, too, had been taken to that room. And I too had fainted.

Nikolayev's wife Milda Drauleh, sitting nearby, overheard our conversation and moved closer, to Anya's obvious embarrassment.

"They dragged me to that same cellar," she said in a heavy voice which she meant to be friendly.

Katya, watching, deliberately turned away, muttering under her breath, "The snake in the grass . . . trying to make up to us."

"They had me put on a nightshirt. A pink nightshirt," Milda continued. "I would never have believed that our party comrades in the NKVD were capable of such things."

"Oh, you wouldn't?" commented Anya tartly.

Milda went on to say that no one seemed interested in the assassination itself. All anyone wanted was a list of "accomplices," or information about Nikolayev's friends and relatives.

"Actually," she said breathlessly, as if she must get it out before someone interrupted—"Actually, I was the first to arrive at the scene of the assassination. I've tried at every hearing to tell them what I saw, but not one of them would listen to me. They acted bored."

I suggested that Milda tell us her story. As a matter of fact, I myself knew little about the actual assassination or how it was carried out.

Milda was clearly pleased by my show of interest. She adjusted the blood-soaked bandage tied around the ball of her foot, and I noticed for the first time that her legs were deformed by podagra. Then in a quiet but agitated voice she unburdened herself of the story no one else would listen to.

A meeting of the party activists had been set for four-thirty on the afternoon of December 1, at the Smolny. As a stenographer at the regional headquarters of the party, Milda was assigned to take the minutes. She arrived at the Smolny ahead of time and went into the office of Kirov's personal secretary to arrange her notebooks and sharpen her pencils. Secretary Sveshnikov was already there. Kirov was working alone in the adjoining office. The connecting door between the two offices was open.

In another office located across the corridor Kirov's assistant Chudov was preparing for the meeting. About a quarter of an hour before the meeting was scheduled, Milda heard one of the party officials enter Chudov's office. Hearing familiar voices, Kirov left his work and went with his secretary to join them.

"I could hear them talking, laughing," Milda said. "For a while, I was alone in the secretary's office." Then, five or ten minutes later, the secretary returned to tell her in an irritated tone that her former husband, Leonid Nikolayev, was there to see her.

"He is? What for? I didn't ask him to come," she replied, without looking up.

"Would you believe it!" the secretary exclaimed. "When he saw me he turned away and headed for the stairway. What an unpleasant fellow!"

Neither of them said anything more about it. They waited, then the secretary suggested that they should go as the meeting was about to start.

Milda gathered up her things and together they went to the door. At that moment a shot rang out in the corridor, then a second shot.

"In a flash, the secretary and I were in the corridor. This is

what we saw: There were two bodies lying on the floor. Nearest to us was Kirov, and two paces away lay Nikolayev. Beside them was a revolver."

People were now rushing out of Chudov's office. The deputy chief of the local NKVD, Zaporozhets, was first. Seeing the two seemingly lifeless bodies on the floor, he yelled something about catching the killers, pulled out his Browning and dashed toward the stairway and down the stairs. The others followed him.

For several minutes, the corridor was deserted, except for Milda. She too had assumed the two men were dead. But suddenly she saw Lenka lift his bloodied head, look around, and mutter, "I did kill that bastard after all!"

By that time some of the people were returning. Hearing their voices coming closer, Nikolayev pulled a razor from the side pocket of his leather jacket and slashed his throat.

"This was more than I could stand," Milda said. "Everything began to swim before my eyes. But before hell broke loose and everyone started running wildly around shouting and telephoning, I heard orders being given to call a doctor . . . save Kirov . . . carry Lenka into the secretary's office."

Milda stopped speaking. She was visibly agitated. At this point Katya called Anya away and the two of us were left alone.

"Tell me," I asked when she had recovered her composure, "why did Kirov take a dislike to Lenka? What did he have against him?"

Instead of replying to my questions, she said, "Your name is Liza Lermolo, isn't it? I have heard a great deal about you. The NKVD officials speak of you as a sort of White Guard siren. According to them you have led countless top Communists astray, transformed them into class enemies."

I had to laugh at this. I was flattered, I told her, but there was, alas, no truth in it.

Then she talked at some length about Nikolayev—who had “little to recommend him except his colossal conceit.” He was shallow and an ignoramus, she declared, with only about two or three years of schooling. The only thing he could trade on was his record as a loyal Communist from his early adolescence. To Milda it was surprising that he had been able for years to hold a key post with the Leningrad Regional Committee as consultant on party affairs because he had neither the experience nor the qualifications necessary for the position. She was convinced that Kirov tolerated him only to spite the NKVD. Kirov and the NKVD had long been at loggerheads. Consequently, when the NKVD demanded that Lenka be fired, Kirov defied their order.

“Lenka would have kept his job indefinitely were it not for Maria Lvovna, Kirov’s wife,” Milda said. One day, at the Committee headquarters, Maria Lvovna happened to overhear Lenka explain the Second Five-Year Plan to two comrades, and in such a way that she was mortified. In Milda’s presence, she indignantly turned on Kirov’s personal secretary.

“This is disgraceful,” she exclaimed. “How can you have anyone that stupid in the post of consultant? The fool is undermining the prestige of the Regional Committee.”

A short time later Nikolayev was transferred to the RKI, a control agency, as an inspector. This was a severe blow to his pride, especially as it entailed a drastic lowering in his standard of living. “Until then we had an attractive apartment in one of the newly built houses reserved for party functionaries,” Milda explained. “We had a ration book of the highest category, and Lenka received the maximum salary allowed a



responsible party member. But after he was transferred to the new post we had to give up all these privileges."

Fortunately, Milda added, she was permitted to stay on as a stenographer at the Regional Committee and that helped augment the family income. And Nikolayev tried to help, "in his own peculiar way," by bringing home all sorts of "samples" and "little gifts" from the enterprises he had inspected. Milda thought better of the gifts he brought home than she did of his abilities as an inspector. Then word of his manipulations reached the proper quarters, and one day, Kirov delivered a scathing attack on the "bureaucratic and useless" activities of the RKI in the Leningrad Region. As an illustration, he cited "the adventures of the RKI inspector Leonid Nikolayev."

"I shall never forget this incident," said Milda. "I was taking down Kirov's report in shorthand. You can imagine my embarrassment. I wanted to crawl under the floor."

Subsequently, the RKI was reorganized and Lenka found himself without a job. He was, however, offered an assignment to do party work in the country—but this he refused to accept. Whereupon, he was expelled from the party for a breach of discipline.

Nikolayev and Milda were then in a predicament. They had the responsibility of her elderly mother and two small children; Nikolayev was without a job and there was no one to turn to because his kin—Milda pointed to Katya sitting in the corner of the cell with her mother—had washed their hands of him. "What was I to do? In order not to lose my own party book, I suggested that Lenka stay away from home for a while, move in with his relatives, so I could give the party comrades the impression that we no longer had anything in common."

This precipitated a bitter quarrel, and Nikolayev complained that Milda was chasing him out of the house. In the end, however, he took his things and moved in with his mother.

"But it was I who wrote the appeal for him to the Central Committee of the party," Milda said defensively. "No one else would do it. It was on the strength of my appeal that he was reinstated. And later, when Kirov blackballed Lenka's application to the Institute of Red Professors, who wrote a complaint about it to Stalin? I did. Because everyone had turned against him. No one wanted to jeopardize his own standing in the party for Lenka's sake. I wrote a detailed complaint to Stalin in care of the Central Committee. But no reply ever came."

Milda mentioned all this to Stalin when she was interrogated by him early in December. She told Stalin "without mincing words" that Nikolayev and she were victimized because they were active anti-Zinovievites. Nikolayev had described the situation in Leningrad in a report addressed to Stalin the previous August. In it he had explained how the Zinovievites were entrenched under Kirov's protective wing. But his report had not even been acknowledged.

Stalin expressed surprise at what she said and ordered a search to discover what had become of Nikolayev's communication. Word came back that it was being "processed" in the Personnel Bureau of the Central Committee, that it was scheduled to be referred to Stalin the very next day!

"That's the sort of red tape that prevails in the Central Committee," Milda raged. "For four months nothing was done about the report. Think of the consequences it has had for Lenka . . . and for all of us."

Her eyes filled with tears. She stretched out on the floor and buried her head in her arms.

All the time we were talking our cellmates had been dozing, paying no attention to us. Eventually the prison guards came for the evening check-up. Then after inspection and roll call, they ordered us to retire.

My neighbor on the floor that night was an attractive young woman in her early thirties. As soon as the lights were turned out, she began to weep. I tried my best to console her, though I myself desperately needed comforting. Neither of us felt much like sleeping.

"How perfectly dreadful! It's like a nightmare!" she sobbed. Then after a while, as she quieted down, her story came out. She was Madame Yuskina, whose husband—an engineer—had recently been executed, charged with complicity in the Nikolayev case.

The Yuskins had had an apartment in the same building where Katya and her mother lived. There was a telephone in the apartment. One day, Nikolayev knocked on the door and in "neighborly fashion" asked if he might use the telephone. From then on, he became a frequent visitor. He would spend hours on the phone calling various party officials—alternately pleading with them for help or heaping abuse on them and threatening them with exposure. The husband, a devoted Communist, had reproached the woman for permitting Nikolayev to make use of them in this way, but she hadn't the heart to refuse him. And so Yuskina had paid with his life.

I asked Madame Yuskina whether she was allowed to say good-by to her husband.

"Oh, no," she replied bitterly. "I never saw him again after the two of us were arrested."

"I happened to see your husband once," I told her. It was

late in December, I recalled. I was being taken to a hearing, when out of one of the rooms came a man escorted by guards. He seemed bewildered, and looked straight ahead with unseeing eyes. Our respective guards yelled at us simultaneously, "Turn right. Face the wall!" We both looked away as we passed each other. Later my investigator, who had apparently observed this scene, wanted to know why I hadn't greeted Yuskin. When I protested that I did not know Yuskina, he tried to badger me into confessing that I had visited the Yuskins often in the company of Nikolayev.

"They plied me, too, with all sorts of questions about you," said Yuskina. With respect to me, she added, her conscience was clear, for she knew nothing about me and told them so. She only regretted that she had talked freely about Nikolayev when she was first questioned, thinking that candor was desirable if she and her husband were to be quickly cleared. But "they," of course, had tried to use everything she said against her. Didn't she realize that Nikolayev's conversations on her telephone constituted overt, antiparty activity? Then why didn't she or her husband report it? Why was she protecting Nikolayev? How could she insist that she and her husband were loyal to the party and the government? Did she suppose that the party allowed them to have a telephone in order to make it easier for the likes of Nikolayev to carry on their underground work? . . . On and on they went, twisting everything and insisting that there was no shade of difference between the Yuskins and the actual perpetrators of the crime.

"That's their logic, God help us!"

## *Chapter V*

JANUARY 19 WAS AN EVENTFUL DAY. EARLY IN the morning, the jail warden came into our cell holding a list in his hand. "Milda Drauleh," he called out, "get your things together. You are leaving with the next convoy."

Twenty minutes later she was led out of the cell, to the loud wailing of the entire Nikolayev family. Milda looked cold and stiff and forlorn, a pathetic figure.

During the "promenade" later that morning, Katya learned that Milda and Nikolayev's younger brother, Pyotr, had been sent by special convoy to Solovki, the notorious concentration camp on Solovetsk Island, in the White Sea.

Katya was still filled with resentment toward Milda. "That wretched person," she fumed. "What a mess she made of things. And now we have to pay for it. All of us are being punished because of her. It's her fault and no one else's. If she had not chased Lenka out of the house, he would not have gone berserk. She was nice enough to him when he had a good job, but as soon as he got into trouble, she turned against him. She's just a mean, selfish woman!"

Dinner was brought to us earlier than usual. The exercise walk that evening was canceled. At around six, the senior warden reappeared. This time he called out the names of seven women who were to leave with the next convoy; the

old woman Maria Nikolayeva; her two daughters, Katya Rogacheva and Anya Pantiukhina; her daughter-in-law, Maksimova-Nikolayeva; and Zinaida Gaiderova, Yuskina, and myself.

We wept and consoled one another.

The Chekist woman, Mirova, came into the cell. She was in her uniform—high boots, leather jacket, a military cap over her mannish haircut. There was something repulsive about her.

Beckoning Katya Rogacheva to her side, she said to her, "I just dropped in to say good-by. Well, Katyusha, my best to you! No use griping, we'll all end up in the same place sooner or later. Believe me, you can consider yourself lucky that you managed to survive at all. You've no idea how many paid with their necks in the last six weeks. We've long since stopped counting them. What a tiring business it was!"

Katya listened with a blank, crestfallen expression on her face.

"Would you believe it," Mirova went on, "I haven't been home since December 1. I've been on duty continuously. It's been a breakneck grind, I can tell you. We sleep right there in the cellar. Catch a few winks, then back to the same routine—executions, a couple of bottles of vodka, more executions—day in, day out . . . I can hardly stand on my feet. But, luckily, it will be over today. As soon as we send all of you off on the convoy, I shall go home and catch up on my sleep."

Yuskina demanded to know where we were being sent.

"To various places. Some of you will go to prison, others to exile—depending on what you deserve."

"But what about those of us who are innocent?" one woman asked.

"Innocent, did you say? No one is innocent. You have all

been found guilty of participating in the conspiracy to assassinate Kirov."

"Where does it say so?" said Yuskina indignantly.

Mirova looked surprised. "What do you mean 'where'? It says so in the verdict."

"In which verdict? We were never shown any verdict," several of us exclaimed.

The verdict, we learned, had been published in the newspapers the day before. When we clamored to see a copy, Mirova advised us not to be in a hurry. We would be told in good time, she said. The Chekists had simply been overworked with the investigations—and so many files to be kept up-to-date. She remembered and recited some of the sentences for us: Zinoviev got ten years in prison; Bakayev, eight; Kamenev, five; other Zinovievites drew five-year terms in concentration camps—and so on.

In conclusion, Mirova said, "You understand, of course, that these sentences are not necessarily final. All cases will be reviewed."

Then she shook hands with Katya. "Well, good-by, Katyusha," she said. "Don't think harshly of me. I tried my best. . . . But you realize what the situation is." She waved and hurried out.

"Who was that horrid creature?" Anya asked Katya.

Katya explained, and added: "I must say that it was decent of her to drop in to say good-by to me." She was obviously moved.

Upon Mirova's departure, there were indignant outcries in the cell. Some of the women were arguing angrily, some were weeping.

"It makes no sense," exclaimed Gaiderova, rising from the floor and addressing the group. "Why should I, a Zinovievite,

be held responsible for a crime committed by a loyal Stalinist? What have I got to do with Nikolayev?" On and on she stormed until Katya interrupted her.

"Didn't you just hear Mirova say that the verdicts are not final, that the cases are still to be reviewed? What are you so wrought up about? Do you suppose that you're suffering any more than the rest of us?"

But Gaiderova would not let herself be squelched. She demanded to know what was going on. Were there no laws? Was there no justice? And why would the Zinovievites, of all people, want to kill Kirov who had been in favor of a reconciliation between the two factions? Kirov was the best friend the Zinovievites had in the party leadership.

Others chimed in. One elderly woman at the far end of the cell observed that a strange change had taken place. In the past, it was assumed that counterrevolutionary organizations were made up of those hostile to the working class. But now the prosecutors would have us believe that active members of the Communist party were themselves fomenting trouble. It was absurd.

Katya tried to shout the women into quiet.

I stood by the wall, dazed, disconsolate, alone. Years more in a concentration camp. Why, dear Lord? Why am I being punished so? I had no one to turn to, no one to sympathize with me. In this place each one had his own burden to bear. I had never felt so alone, so completely a stranger.

Shortly, the warden appeared and summoned Katya, Anya, Gaiderova, and me.

"Get your things and come with me, quickly!"

Waiting for us at the gate was a Black Maria. Already several men were inside. As soon as we got in, the door was slammed, and the van started rolling.



"Where are they taking us?" asked one of the men.

His neighbor slushed him, saying: "We are not permitted to talk here."

We rode on in silence. After a while, the car stopped. We heard voices outside.

"We are ready to receive the prisoners," declared an authoritative feminine voice.

Someone else said that she would have to wait for Comrade Agranov, who would be there soon with the prisoners' dossiers.

We waited and froze. . . . Finally, they arrived—Agranov, Yezhov, and two uniformed Chekists carrying Manila folders. Agranov and Yezhov were in civilian clothes.

The door of the police van was unlocked. There was a gust of cold air. We found ourselves at the loading platform of a railroad siding. In front of us was a string of convict cars. At the entrance to the last car were two rows of soldiers, facing each other, forming a human corridor.

"Everything ready?" inquired Agranov as the chief of the train convoy rushed over to him.

"We are ready, Comrade Deputy Minister!"

"Very well, let's begin." And Agranov took a file of papers from one of the Chekists.

Turning to the passengers inside the police van, he instructed us: "As I call your name, say 'here,' and come out of the car." Then: "Zinoviev!"

"Here," responded one of the men I had noticed before. He picked up a heavy suitcase, got out, and was pushed toward the corridor of soldiers as Agranov gave his dossier to the convoy chief.

Agranov peered into the Black Maria. "Kamenev," he called.

"Here."

At that moment, an elderly man in civilian attire approached Agranov, handed him a bundle, and said something in a low tone of voice. Agranov untied the bundle. Inside were a pair of felt boots, a shawl, and a thermos bottle. He gave the bundle to Kamenev. "Lev Borisovich," he said, "here are some things your old woman sent you. You may take them along."

It seemed that Yezhov was about to protest but Agranov, apparently aware of it, hurriedly ordered the chief of the convoy to take the dossier and called out the next name: "Fedorov."

"Here."

"Come out. . . . Take the dossier. . . . Bakayev."

"Here."

"Come out. . . . Take the dossier."

After the four men, Agranov called to Katya, Anya, me, and Gaiderova—in that order. We clambered out with our belongings and were directed to the same car. By that time a second Black Maria drove up. The procedure of transferring the prisoners to the convoy was repeated.

Inside the railway car, we four women were assigned a four-place compartment, the first from the door. In the next compartment were seated the four men. Later, four women passed us on their way to the third compartment. The fourth compartment was assigned to another group of four men.

More and more passengers passed through our car. Gaiderova and Katya exchanged greetings with some of them, despite stern warnings from the guards. A tall, heavy-set, red-haired man, with a bandage around his head, went by. Gaiderova hailed him.

"Korshunov, how do you feel?"

"Hello, Zinusha, hello! As you see, I'm still in one piece," he replied, moving on.

"He's one of the finest people I've ever known," Gaiderova remarked. "They don't come any better. A conscientious worker, a good party man. But, alas, men like that are no longer allowed to go free."

More friends turned up, among them Anya's husband. Greetings were exchanged in the other compartments, too, as friends met. The guards were furious.

As soon as our ear was filled, Agranov and Yezhov put a stop to this "fraternizing." They ordered the soldiers moved from our car to a position farther up the track, beyond our field of vision. We could no longer greet nor even see the new arrivals.

In our compartment, Anya and Katya took over the lower bench, while Gaiderova and I spread ourselves out on the upper bench. We were brought our "traveling ration" for a week: three kilograms of bread, seven herrings, and three jars of sauerkraut apiece.

The train pulled out late that night. With the break of dawn, it became apparent that we were moving in a southeasterly direction.

"All roads lead to Siberia," we heard Kamenev exclaim in the neighboring compartment.

In the morning as I passed their compartment on the way to the water closet, I overheard Zinoviev remark to Kamenev, "Did you ever realize, Lyova, that you and I had so many adherents?"

"And the amazing thing," replied Kamenev, "is that most of them have such unfamiliar faces."

The men in the compartment broke into laughter. "Quiet!" shouted the guards. "Enough of that."

It was a long and tiresome trip, and cold. The cars were uncated. Though we wrapped ourselves in all the clothes we had, we could barely keep warm. Moreover, we were cramped in the small compartment. There was not enough room on the narrow benches for one person to stretch out comfortably, let alone two. And my body still ached from the injuries I had sustained in the altercation with Ignatenko.

There was nothing to read. We were even denied newspapers. The only distraction was conversation. And talk we did—hours and days at a stretch. So long as we talked quietly and stayed in our own compartment, the guards for the most part left us alone.

We talked about everything, but chiefly about the Kirov case. We would always return to it, because it was uppermost in our minds and because it concerned us intimately—our life and freedom. Besides, it was the one thing we had in common—each of us was a victim of the case. Despite our diverse backgrounds, despite our political differences, we had been bound together by the case into which we had been drawn unwittingly. We were eager to talk about it. It was almost like an obsession.

The only exception was Anya Pantiukhina. She was unwell. (I subsequently learned that she was pregnant.) Anya spent most of the time sleeping or dozing. She seldom joined us in conversation.

Actually, there was little general conversation among the four of us. Gaiderova and Katya disliked each other intensely. To Katya, the proud proletarian; Gaiderova was an “intellectual” and hence an object of contempt. Gaiderova for her part had nothing but disdain for the “coarse, illiterate, and unprincipled” Katya. Also, there were the ideological differences between them. Katya was a staunch Stalinist, while

Gaiderova was an ardent Oppositionist, a member of the Zinoviev faction of the Communist party.

But curiously enough, they were both very nice to me. Because they regarded me as a "political innocent," each of them would speak to me freely and confide in me. I, in turn, was the perfect listener. Anxious to learn all I could about the Kirov case, I would draw them out and encourage them to share with me what they knew about it.

The first few days I stayed on the upper bench most of the time. It was too much of an effort to climb up and down. Zinaida Gaiderova was very obliging. She insisted on my occupying most of the space on the bench we shared, though she herself was a rather large woman, above average in height and somewhat overweight. She had a massive head and large features. But her manner was very gentle. I was touched by her solicitude for my comfort. It was particularly surprising coming from a veteran Communist.

Gaiderova was fifty-three, highly educated and well read. She had joined the Communists in 1905, and had been active for many years in the party underground. Until 1927 she lived in Moscow, working as a consultant both at the Lenin Institute and the Historical Research Division of the party. She was one of the famous group of "121" prominent party members (including Trotsky, Kamenev, and Katalynov) who had signed the declaration criticizing the Stalinist leadership that had been addressed to the Fifteenth Congress of the All-Russian Communist party. Although Gaiderova later recanted and withdrew her signature from the Declaration, she was nonetheless transferred from Moscow to Leningrad as punishment for her "disloyal" action. There she was accorded a rather cool reception by Sergei Kirov, the party boss of Leningrad. But later on, after she had made a speech at the

Hammer and Sickie plant, in which she abjectly repudiated her former views, Gaidcrova was "rehabilitated" and appointed Assistant Rector of the Sverdlov University. In addition, she was assigned to special work with the Historical Research Division of the Leningrad party.

In the course of our talks together Gaiderova told me of the events that led to her banishment from Moscow.

"First of all," she said, "you must realize that the 'Declaration of 121' was originally signed by twice that number. But most of the comrades withdrew their signatures before the document was published in the press. At that time I was living on the outskirts of Moscow, in Sokolniki. Whenever I worked late in the city, I would spend the night with the Bakayevs."

I asked her whether this was the same Bakayev who was traveling in the compartment next to ours.

"Yes. He and his wife had a large apartment in Moscow. As a member of the Central Control Commission of the party, he carried considerable weight in official circles. His wife, Comrade Kostina, is a very hospitable woman and enjoyed entertaining friends."

Among the frequent visitors to the Bakayevs' home she recalled men like Maxim Gorky, Zinoviev, Kamenev. There was always a relaxed atmosphere there. Though he was a loyal Stalinist, Bakayev was not a fanatic and it was not unusual to hear him or his guests ridicule the rulers of the Kremlin, including the "great and wise" Stalin. It was Bakayev who had warned Gaiderova late in 1927 that the Central Committee of the party was planning to exile all those who had signed the "Declaration of 121." By promptly withdrawing her signature she escaped arrest and exile. Her only punishment was the

transfer to Leningrad. The other signatories did not get off so easily.

"I arrived in Leningrad at the very height of the campaign against the Oppositionists. Leading the attack against them were Kirov, Chudov, and Nikolayev."

"Nikolayev? Which Nikolayev? Leonid?" I asked.

The same, she said. The "club-footed Lenka," as he was called. He cut an important figure in those days, and as Chudov's right-hand man he wielded a fair amount of power. "No one delighted persecuting the Zinovievites as much as our friend Lenka did," Gaiderova assured me.

Gaiderova herself was not molested. In her work for the Historical Research Division she enjoyed the protection of Kirov. It was her task to gather material about the Communist youth of Leningrad and the part played by them in the Bolshevik Revolution and the civil war. The work fascinated her, she told me, and contact with the idealistic Komsomol youth who made up the Young Communist League rekindled her revolutionary ardor. As she put it: "It lifted me above the grim realities of Soviet life. I acquired a new faith in the future of our country."

Under the auspices of the Historical Research Division, a reunion was held in Leningrad of Komsomol veterans of the civil war. It subsequently became an annual event.

I asked Gaiderova if Leonid Nikolayev attended the Komsomol reunions. Oh, no, she replied, he boycotted them, denouncing the participants as a "bunch of Zinovievites who never came within gunshot of the revolutionary battles." It was his boast that he, Nikolayev, who had actually shed his blood for the Soviets did not have to attend these "fake reunions" to prove his attachment to the revolution.

Gaiderova and I laughed. It was so typical of Nikolayev.

"It's difficult to realize," she said when we returned to the subject some time later, "that the last Komsomol reunion was held less than a year ago. The main speaker was Kirov. He delivered a powerful address in which he urged the younger generation to prepare themselves for the great tasks ahead. They were the builders of a new society, he told them, and must use their intellects for creative work. You should have seen how the faces of the young people shone. And you should have heard the ovation they gave Kirov."

Among those who led the applause were the twelve young men—Katalynov and others—who only a few months later were condemned to death, judged guilty along with Nikolayev of the assassination of Kirov.

I told Gaiderova that I had met these young men briefly in the series of confrontations arranged by the NKVD, but that I had never seen or heard of them before the investigation. Gaiderova for her part knew them well. She had worked with them for years. She knew their stories by heart. They were dear to her. In a special sense, they were her conscience, her justification for the years she herself had given to the Cause. For hours at a time, she would speak to me about them, until I, too, got to know their life stories. These young men had much in common. Each had come of a working class family, had participated in the Bolshevik uprising, had fought valiantly in the civil war. Each had at one time been subjected to reprisals or suspended from the Communist party for supporting the Zionievite faction in its struggle against the Stalinist leadership.

"They were the finest representatives of the postrevolutionary generation—courageous, intelligent, idealistic," Gaiderova declared. "They had boundless faith in the revolution and what it stood for. They believed in free discussion and



spoke their minds fearlessly. Naturally, it came as a shock to discover that the views they had expressed in all honesty were interpreted as hostile acts against the state. They could not accept the idea that mere participation in a frank intraparty dispute could lead to arrest and exile."

All these young men, with the exception of Yuskin, she added, were active and leading members of the Young Leninist Club in Leningrad.

I was curious about the club, which had figured prominently in the Kirov investigation. According to Gaiderova, it was founded by Zinoviev, to serve as a cultural center for Communist youth and the best instructors and lecturers were made available by the party. Sports and amateur theatricals and dances, as well as lectures and concerts, were included among the club activities, for which an old mansion on the Neva served as headquarters. Naturally, some of the rougher elements were attracted, too, Gaiderova admitted, and many a young woman had reason to associate the club with abortions and venereal disease. On the whole, however, it was a worth-while organization and a large number of Komsomol members looked back upon their years of association with it as the most stimulating and happiest of their lives.

"Somehow Lenka Nikolayev wormed his way into the club and made himself an important place," Gaiderova said. He served as secretary for a time, in the early twenties. As usual, he took the maximum advantage of his post, "dragging home every object within reach and falling in love with every girl in sight."

When he was about eighteen, Lenka became enamored of a certain Natasha Utochka and proposed to her. Impressed by his position at the club, Natasha accepted him. But her father took a different view. When he saw Lenka, he forbade

her marriage to "that freak." Soon afterward, Natasha was married off to a solid, respectable member of the bourgeoisie, a non-party man.

Embittered by this affair, Nikolayev decided to leave Leningrad. His decision may have been prompted also by the discovery that some rugs had "mysteriously disappeared" from the clubhouse. However that may be, he asked and procured a transfer to Pskov.

"In Pskov," Gaiderova concluded, "Lenka spent six years, working for the city party committee, under Chudov. It was there that he married Milda Drauleh. Later, Chudov was transferred to Leningrad and took Lenka with him, to help stamp out the Zinovievite opposition. In this, Lenka proved an invaluable assistant. The rest of his story you know."

I was much interested in what Gaiderova told me. It gave me a better understanding of Nikolayev and helped supply important clues in the strange puzzle that was the Kirov case.

Another time, when we were tossing on our hard bench, unable to sleep, I said to Gaiderova: "You were at liberty for more than a month after Kirov was killed. You must have heard rumors about the assassination. Tell me—what did they say in Leningrad about Nikolayev's motive for killing Kirov?"

"There were lots of rumors," Gaiderova replied, "mostly nonsense. Everyone was talking and everyone had his own explanation for the murder. According to the most romantic version, Nikolayev supposedly held a post in the State Timber Trust which required his frequent presence in Moscow, away from his 'beautiful' wife and their children. In his absence, so the story goes, Kirov fell victim to Mme. Nikolayev's charms and visited her frequently after working hours. One day Nikolayev, returning unexpectedly, found the two in a compromising situation and in a jealous rage whipped out his

gun and shot Kirov. He also tried to kill himself but failed. Then, in order to protect Kirov's wife from a knowledge of the facts, Kirov's body was moved to the Smolny."

Gaiderova's voice was edged with sarcasm. "You saw Lenka's wife, Milda Drauleh, did you not? Then you know how irresistible she is."

"Yes, she's quite a beauty," I agreed, in the same ironic tone.

"My feeling is that if Lenka had ever found Kirov with Milda in the bedroom the last thing he'd have wanted would have been to shoot Kirov. On the contrary, he'd have been beside himself with joy."

We both laughed.

"However," Gaiderova added, "this version is no more ridiculous than the one originating with Vishinsky and Agranov—that Nikolayev assassinated Kirov at the instigation of the Zinovievites."

## *Chapter V I*

ON THE FOURTH DAY OF OUR JOURNEY, WE ran into a severe snowstorm which held up the train for three days. We were trapped at the edge of a forest, far from a railroad station, far from any human habitation. The hours went by like lead with nothing to do but talk. There were the same companions, the same thoughts.

One night, choking from lack of air, I climbed down from the upper bench. Katya was awake and invited me to sit beside her. We were deep in conversation when Anya woke up the next morning and she protested when I made a move to return to my place. She would just as soon share the bench with Gaiderova, she said. So for the rest of the trip, I stayed below with Katya, and in that time I learned much of her story.

As a child Katya knew many hardships. Her father was a drunkard and a tyrant and there was little money in the family. She had barely three years of schooling, then at the age of eleven she was apprenticed to a tailor. In 1917, when she was nineteen, she joined the Communist party and during the civil war served as a nurse with the Red Guards.

"All told, I did my part for the revolution," she declared. "I have served the party faithfully. To be frank, I have also looked out for my own interests. I'm a practical woman, and

fun-loving. I like to drink, to have a good time. I believe in free love, as it was taught us by the October Revolution, but no one can say anything against me on that score. I was married three times, each time to an honorable man. The first two held important posts in the party in Leningrad. My last husband, Rogachev, was an Old Bolshevik and Chekist. He was a close friend of Sergci Alliluev, Stalin's father-in-law."

Rogachev was transferred from Moscow to the Leningrad office of the NKVD shortly after the death of Stalin's wife, Nadezhda Allilueva. Here he met Katya in 1933, and they were soon married. A son was born to them. Rogachev, however, was not destined to live long.

"What happened to him?" I asked Katya, and was told that he had shot himself. I suggested that jealousy might have been the cause but she said No—that he was forced to do it.

As Katya explained the story to me, I gathered that Rogachev's transfer from Moscow to Leningrad had been in the nature of a disciplinary action. While in Moscow he had been so indiscreet as to probe one of the Kremlin's deepest secrets—the secret of the death of Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda Allilueva.

Nadezhda's father, stricken by the tragedy and the mystery surrounding it, came to his friend Rogachev and enlisted his help. A private investigation was begun—which revealed that Nadezhda Allilueva's personal maid had been with her at her death. The maid, Natasha, had disappeared. It was said that she was being held prisoner at the Suzdal Monastery. If someone could get through to her the mystery might be cleared up.

Rogachev, pretending official business for the NKVD, went to Suzdal with the thought of seeing Natasha. But before he could carry out his plan he was recalled to Moscow. His

transfer to Leningrad followed—and that was the end of the investigation.

In Leningrad, Rogachev worked under Zaporozhets, the deputy chief of the local NKVD. For a year or so, everything seemed to go along well. Then in 1934, immediately after the Seventeenth Congress of the Communist party, Rogachev received a directive from Moscow. It was a most unusual directive—*Rogachev was ordered to arrange the murder of a Politburo member.*

"It came as a shock to Rogachev," Katya admitted. "He tried hard to get out of the assignment, but he was told plainly that if he turned it down he would be sent at once to the so-called Nameless Isolator for the rest of his life—because of his attempt to dig out the facts in Allilueva's death!"

Under pressure, Rogachev assented, and he was told to return in two days to work out a plan of action. During those two days, according to Katya, he went through the torments of hell. He was doomed whatever he did, and he knew it. If he carried out the assassination of the Politburo member, he himself would soon be liquidated to seal his lips. The alternative was a slow death in the Nameless Isolator. He decided, therefore, to do away with himself. On the very hour set for the conference, Rogachev went home, wrote a note to Katya, and shot himself.

"In the note he asked me to be sure to destroy it as soon as I finished reading it," Katya said. "He also warned me not to let on to the Chekists that I had any idea why he committed suicide. About the Chekists, I did as he told me—but I never did destroy the note. I hid it. I pasted it under the wallpaper in my bedroom. Perhaps when I'm free again, it may come in handy. Who knows?"

Oddly enough, Rogachev's suicide did not affect Katya's

standing in the party. She continued to hold her post as director of the women's department in the Vyborg District Committee of the party. Both she and her mother had a ready answer to the questionings of the Chekists. They insisted that Rogachev never shared his official secrets with them.

As for her brother Lenka, he did not get off so easily. The NKVD tormented him for a long time.

"The poor fellow. He had just been fired from the RKI and was having trouble at home. And on top of that, he was being dragged to interrogations nearly every day. Lenka was going out of his mind."

Eventually, however, the NKVD eased up on him. What's more, Zaporozhets, the deputy chief, decided to take Lenka under his wing. "Out of human kindness," Katya explained. "He felt sorry for Lenka. Here was a loyal party man going to seed. The deputy chief was willing to help him. But not Kirov, the sadist. He blocked Lenka's every move. That's what finally drove Lenka to kill him. It became clear to me when I read Lenka's diary."

"Which diary?" I asked, amazed. For this was news indeed.

Katya said that her brother called his diary "A Testament to My Children," and in it he recounted in detail his grievances against Kirov. Nikolayev kept the curious document hidden in Katya's piano, where she accidentally found it a few days before Kirov was assassinated.

According to Katya, there was nothing antiparty or anti-Soviet in Lenka's diary-testament. Politically it was unassailable. But it did record a long list of instances where Kirov had personally persecuted Nikolayev. Throughout the book, Kirov was depicted as an "evil genius."

The first entry dealt with Nikolayev's expulsion from the party—"which was Lenka's own fault," according to Katya.

The diary-testament went on from there to describe his appeal and reinstatement; how he was thwarted by Kirov in his effort to obtain a pass to a sanatorium when his epileptic seizures became more frequent; how the deputy chief, out of pity, sent him to Pudozh for a rest and sponsored his application for admission to the Institute of Red Professors—only to have Kirov strike his name from the list of applicants at the last minute; how he tried and failed to see Kirov in person in order to learn why he was being blackballed; how he sought other party jobs and was repeatedly turned down because of Kirov; how, finally, it came to him that Kirov was destroying the party organization in Leningrad, filling its ranks with Zinovievites, Trotskyists, and other alien elements, and that the only way to save the party was to do away with Kirov. This task he, Nikolayev, as a loyal member of the party of Lenin and Stalin, proposed to take upon himself. . . . The diary concluded with an exhortation to his sons to follow their father's footsteps and serve selflessly the cause of "our beloved" Communist party.

After reading the diary, Katya had rushed to Zaporozhets, to warn him of her brother's intentions, but he would not take her seriously. When she demanded that he take steps to avert the catastrophe, he merely laughed. Whereupon, they quarreled bitterly. Katya was so exasperated with the deputy chief that he was forced to give her a drink to calm her. After that she went home and took to bed. She was ill and still in bed on December first when the police came to arrest her.

"What troubles me," Katya confided, "is where did Lenka get a pistol? It is known that he did not own one after his expulsion from the party. To buy a pistol under present conditions is next to impossible. And even if he had had an opportunity to do so, he couldn't have paid for it. He hadn't a



blessed kopeck to his name in those last weeks. He kept borrowing from me all the time. On the very day of the assassination, he begged me for a half-ruble to pay his tram fare to the Smolny."

This was, as Katya said, a puzzle, one of the secrets that Nikolayev took with him to the grave. Where did he get the Nagan-type pistol with which he shot Kirov?

"To be sure," Katya added, "the Chekists have their own theory about it. They claim that Lenka got the pistol from a man called Avdeyev, an old Bolshevik underground worker." But this claim she dismissed as preposterous—first, because the two men hardly knew each other; second, because Avdeyev was an ardent supporter of Kirov and certainly would not knowingly have lent his weapon for such a purpose.

"And there's another riddle in the case," said Katya. "Our apartment was searched on December 1, about five in the afternoon, barely a half-hour after the assassination. The search was conducted by the deputy chief himself. I noticed that as soon as he entered the place he went straight to the piano and fished out Lenka's diary. Then he demanded to know where the other copy was. How did he know there were two diaries?"

Katya's mother gave him to understand that the second diary was in safekeeping with Nikolayev's aunt in Pudozh. Actually, the mother lied; it was plastered into the wall of the apartment dining room, behind the buffet. Someday, Katya remarked, this too might come in handy.

Neither of us could explain why this diary had not figured in the evidence at the time of the investigations.

While the apartment was being searched, Katya remembered, a Chekist official burst in to tell the deputy chief that Kirov's bodyguard, Borisov, had "awakened" and asked to be

taken at once to Kirov. The deputy chief said that he himself would see to the matter and left hurriedly after ordering his men to continue the search.

"There would be nothing odd about this," was Katya's comment, "were it not for the fact that en route to the Smolny, Kirov's bodyguard collapsed in Zaporozhets' car, and died of a heart attack!" \*

We reconstructed the chain of events: At four-thirty P.M. on December 1, 1934, Nikolayev appeared at the Smolny, intent on killing Kirov. Kirov was unguarded. Nikolayev shot and killed him, then shot himself. No one was around. Where was Kirov's bodyguard, Borisov? He, it developed, was not even in the building but was out motoring through the streets of Leningrad. If this was a coincidence it was a mighty strange one.

Katya and I looked at each other wide-eyed. Whatever notion I had had that I knew all about the Kirov case was badly shattered. Yet somehow, what Katya had told me bolstered my hopes. Obviously, the case was not closed. It couldn't be. There were too many loose ends left. In the interests of justice, the case would have to be reviewed. And in the course of the new investigation it would become abundantly clear to all that I was completely innocent.

I suddenly felt better. Even the pain from my wounds seemed to ease.

\* Official Report of Court Proceedings in the Trial of the Right-Trotskyist Bloc, March 2-13, 1938, page 245: "When the members of the government Commission arrived in Leningrad (on December 2, 1934) and summoned Borisov to the Smolny to question him about the Kirov assassination, Zaporozhets decided to kill him."

## *Chapter VII*

ON THE NINTH DAY OF OUR JOURNEY, THE train stopped at an unidentified station. Our so-called "convoy," which consisted of a locomotive and three cars, was broken into two sections—two of the cars were attached to a train going south, while the locomotive and the remaining car, in which we were, proceeded east.

Finally, on the morning of February 2, we arrived in Chelyabinsk. After a wait of perhaps a half-hour, we were loaded into Black Marias and driven to the center of town—to the Chelyabinsk Political Isolator of the NKVD.

The train trip had weakened all of us. Our faces were drawn and green, our lips were parched. And no wonder. We had been cooped up for eleven days, without fresh air, in unheated cars. Descending from the Black Maria, Anya was seized with nausea and had to be carried into the isolator building. As for me, I managed to negotiate the short distance unaided, though my legs were unsteady and my eyes were blinded by the sudden bright light.

Inside the isolator, a hot bath awaited us. The women in our group were first to be taken to the bathhouse where we were issued new undergarments and robes. Of our possessions, we were permitted to retain only the winter overshoes, top

coats, and shawls. The rest of our belongings were held for "safekeeping."

"'Transformed am I from Cossack to Turk,'" Katya recited. "Come, girls, let us be merry. Here, one can live. Free lodging, free food, and lots of men. What more can you ask? Too bad I wasn't brought here when I was younger—say two, three years ago. Think of all the fun I'd have had!"

From the bathhouse, Katya and Gaiderova were taken to the Communist sector, to a cell on the first floor. Anya and I were assigned to a cell in the non-party sector, on the second floor. The assignment of new prisoners to their cells took up the entire day. Apparently no one was prepared for the large influx and the people in charge had a difficult time of it—to the vast amusement of the old prisoners.

Once I had arranged myself in my cell, I soon fell into a deep sleep from which I did not waken until morning when guards arrived for a check-up and to bring us our breakfast. We had barely finished the meal when loud cries from the courtyard sent us rushing to the windows. And there through patches of the windowpane not covered by frost, we beheld an unusual scene.

The Communist prisoners, perhaps thirty men and women, were pouring into the courtyard for their morning walk. I opened the *fortochka* or ventilator in the window to see and hear what was going on. Zinoviev, livid with rage, was yelling at Bakayev: "You vicious liar, you damned renegade! You're the one who fabricated that yarn about a Moscow Counter-revolutionary Center. We have you to thank for it!"

Bakayev tried to say something in his defense, when Fedorov pounced on him. "You didn't mention a word of it to us throughout the trip. Why were you so secretive? Why couldn't you have been open and frank about it? But no—we

had to learn about your false testimony from the newspapers here. You damned scoundrel, you turncoat!" Fedorov struck Bakayev in the face. Mrachkovsky limped over to join the fray. He punched Bakayev with all his might, shouting, "You stool pigeon, bastard!"

Several of the prisoners, including Bakayev's wife, Kostina, vainly tried to intercede. Armed guards ran out of the building to restore order.

"This is disgraceful," yelled the warden of the isolator. "We have never before had anything like this in this sector. Imagine Old Bolsheviks striking one another with fists! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

"Let Agranov and Vishinsky be ashamed of themselves," replied Zinoviev.

Bakayev, his face covered with blood, was led off by the guards while his wife, with tears in her eyes, endeavored to reason with Zinoviev.

"Grisha," she pleaded, "you have no idea what we went through. Look at Bakayev, his entire skin is perforated with the injections they gave him. We were both, time and again, subjected to these injections, to drugs that weakened our will. How could anyone withstand such torture? Would anyone in our place have acted differently?"

She turned to Kamenev, saying bitterly, "Agranov is your protégé. You're the one who helped him rise to power."

Kamenev, a shawl draped around his shoulders, was standing aside, pale and distraught.

"In that case," said Zinoviev, "we must all protest immediately. We must demand a review of the case. The methods employed were outrageous, a flagrant miscarriage of justice."

Bakayev reappeared in the courtyard to announce that he

was writing a renunciation of his testimony that very day. "It was exacted from me under duress," he said in explanation.

One could hear Gaiderova's voice shouting, "Bravo, Bakayev! We must find courage to fight the Stalinist oppressors. Down with Agranov and Vishinskyl!"

Listening, I thought to myself: This may start something. If such important political figures really kick up a fuss, it may lead to a review of the case.

After the Communist sector finished exercising, it was our turn. We no sooner appeared in the snow-swept courtyard than there were loud cheers: "Hurrah! Glory to Nikolayev! Welcome to Nikolayev's valiant comrades-in-arms!"

The greetings came from a group of old timers at the isolator, the Social Revolutionary prisoners, who had been admitted to the courtyard shortly before us. They surrounded us, introduced themselves, shook our hands. Eagerly they listened to our stories about the sufferings we had undergone, and in return they gave us practical advice on how to deal with the administrative officers of the isolator. To Anya they explained that as an expectant mother she had the right to be released from the isolator as soon as she reached the seventh month of her pregnancy. Great deference was shown to Anya as the sister of "the martyred hero" Leonid Nikolayev. She was presented with candy, nuts, and fruit.

"My dear comrades," said a pleasant-looking Trans-Caucasian to Anya and me, "no matter how unhappy you two may feel at this time, you must not forget how truly fortunate you are to be the sister and comrade of one of history's leading heroes. You probably don't yet realize Leonid Nikolayev's greatness. The time will come when the people of Russia will

erect a monument to this valiant fighter against the Stalinist tyranny!"

"This must be an insane asylum," Anya whispered to me.

One of the leaders of the Social Revolutionary sector approached to ask Anya if she would be good enough to prepare a detailed report about her brother. "We are interested in the reasons that impelled a young Communist-activist to assassinate a leader of his party," he explained, adding that it would be helpful if she could shed some light on his political metamorphosis—trace the stages Nikolayev went through in his progress from Communist to terrorist-individualist.

Anya declined the assignment, using as an excuse her "delicate condition." She suggested that they ask Katya instead. "She is much better informed than I am." Then she led the two Social Revolutionaries over to Katya's window. "Would you care to talk to these men about Lenka?" she called to her sister.

"What will I get out of it? Will there be any presents for me?" Katya teased.

"Everything we possess will be at your disposal," said the men earnestly.

"I was only joking," Katya assured them with a flirtatious smile, and went on to say that she would be delighted to tell them all she knew about her heroic brother. But how could it be arranged? Prisoners in different sectors could not come together.

The men disposed of that problem easily. They would delegate two of their comrades to stand by her window, listen to her account and report it back to the Social Revolutionaries.

"Suits me," said Katya. "But give me a couple of handsome fellows."

The two men selected were named Myagkov and Lukyan-chikov, and Katya began her "report" during the next walk. She dragged it out for two days, shamelessly distorting and coloring the facts. At great length she dwelled on Nikolayev's supposed encounters with exiled Social Revolutionaries in Pudozh in 1934 and their alleged ideological influence on him. Specifically, she mentioned their exiled leader Mirabelli, who—according to what she had been told by the NKVD investigators—had supplied Nikolayev with terrorist literature and talked with him at length.

Katya's report had an electrifying effect on the Social Revolutionaries. During one of the walks, the sector adopted by acclamation a resolution proclaiming Nikolayev an adherent of the party. It called for the observance of December first, when the Kirov assassination took place, as a day of celebration, and placed Nikolayev's sisters under the protection of the Social Revolutionary sector.

The resolution was read by Myagkov in the courtyard, beside Katya's window, and in the presence of Anya and her husband.

"Comrades!" declared Myagkov when he finished reading the resolution. "I propose five minutes of silence in tribute to our fallen hero, Leonid Nikolayev."

All who were gathered there removed their hats and remained still. Then, the period of silence ended, Myagkov cleared his throat and addressed them. "Comrades," he said, "we can well be proud of the indestructibility of the Social Revolutionary party. Even under the savage onslaughts of the Communist regime, our members manage to recruit new adherents. Long live the party of the Social Revolutionaries!"

There was a boisterous ovation, handshaking, embraces. Old men, seasoned veterans of past Social Revolutionary



struggles, went wild with enthusiasm. They behaved like school children.

I stood aside, taking no part in the celebration. An elderly man came up to me, and introduced himself as Kireyev. He apologized for meddling in my personal affairs but said he had been observing me and felt he must advise me that it was bad to keep aloof from what was going on in the isolator. "I know whereof I speak," he declared. "I've been here nearly ten years and I've made a careful study of the customs and mores of the place. I know the psychological effect the isolator has upon prisoners. Believe me, if you continue to hold yourself apart, it will only go harder with you. Neither seclusion nor brooding will help you withstand the rigorous regime here."

I asked him what I should do. How was I to conduct myself? To this he replied that I must not be antisocial but take an active part in the life around me, find something that would occupy and entertain me. "In short," he said, "you must become gregarious. It's the only way to avert a mental breakdown."

I told him that I would be only too glad to occupy myself with something, but what specifically could I do?

"At present," he said, "it is difficult to make concrete suggestions, our routine has been so disrupted by new repressive measures following the Kirov assassination."

"You mean this isolator has been subjected to repressions?" I asked.

He nodded, and went on to explain. First, books had been taken away from the prisoners, and all writing equipment. Then they shut the library, prohibited all forms of sports, limited the number of things which could be purchased in the commissary, deprived the prisoners of the tools and ma-

materials for handicraft work, and cut off all but the Communist sector from the supply of newspapers. A few papers, limited in number, were still being supplied to the Communist prisoners.

I asked him how the prisoners had reacted to the curtailment of their liberties.

"Splendidly, excepting for the Communists," he replied. "They had promptly instituted a plan for organized obstruction, but after four days they came to terms when the chief warden gave his assurance that the abridgment of rights was a temporary measure. He promised to restore all privileges as soon as the government relaxed its ban."

"In other words, life was fairly easy here before the Kirov affair?"

"Oh, yes," he answered me. "The political isolators were most humane places of detention. Any number of people I know thought this was heaven after what they had gone through in exile. Truly!" And he pointed out that until the Kirov assassination political isolators were reserved to high state criminals, former Kremlin officials, and the like. Compared with concentration camps, political isolators had no housing problem, the food was decent, there was no forced labor.

He had to admit, however, that the so-called temporary measures had lasted too long. Also, our isolator—intended to accommodate a hundred prisoners—was now being reconstructed to take care of twice that number. Large cells were being partitioned to make two or three small cells.

I tried to get my new acquaintance to give me further suggestions for employing my time, but our walk period was drawing to an end and he dismissed the subject evasively.

"We'll talk about it later," he said. "I have a project in mind."

The excitement of those first few days—the beating up of Bakayev in the Communist sector and the demonstration of the Social Revolutionaries in honor of Nikolayev—did not last. Before long life in the isolator settled down to dull routine. Gradually I accustomed myself to it. The food ration was sparse and monotonous: four hundred grams of black bread a day; in the mornings ersatz coffee, sometimes slightly sweetened; at noon soup (fish soup twenty-two times a month, meat soup eight times a month); in the evenings more soup or ersatz tea. In addition, one could purchase at the commissary on Saturdays, out of one's own money—five hundred grams of bread, one hundred grams of butter, two hundred grams of sugar, and two hundred grams of vegetables (onions, garlic, cabbage). Prisoners were also permitted to receive by mail or through the Red Cross food and clothing parcels sent to them by relatives. Letters could be posted twice a month. Writing papers, envelopes, and stamps were on sale at the commissary. However, I decided not to avail myself of that privilege. Something prompted me to wait awhile.

Twice a day we were let out for our "exercise walks," each lasting a half-hour. The courtyard was spacious—thirty by fifty yards—and there were benches for resting. At the remote end of the yard was an unused volley-ball field.

The inmates of the isolator were not required to work. All the services were performed either by the isolator personnel or by trusted criminal prisoners from the neighboring jail. Consequently, all of us idled our days away in the cells.

On my tenth day there two important events occurred. In the morning, immediately after breakfast, Bakayev was dispatched by special convoy to Moscow for a "review of his

case." In the evening, that same day, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Kostina (Bakayev's wife) were also shipped off, but not to Moscow. They were transferred to the political isolator in Upper-Uralsk. We all felt sorry for them.

Spring came, and with it an agonizing melancholy. Anya was ailing. The pregnancy under prison conditions had a debilitating effect on her health and her spirits. She declined to join us in our walks—"out of false modesty," according to Katya. On the other hand, Katya enjoyed those walks immensely since they brought her in contact with many men.

## *Chapter VIII*

MY FRIENDS, I NOW KNEW, HAD BEEN RIGHT IN saying that I was politically uninformed. But my education in politics was progressing rapidly.

On the first of May two anti-Communist meetings took place in the courtyard of the isolator. The first was held by the Georgian Mensheviks. Speaker after speaker roundly denounced the Bolshevik tyranny, predicted the inevitable fall of the Soviet regime, damned the Stalinist cutthroats, and called upon his comrades to hold fast until the final victory.

The speeches were delivered in ringing, loud voices which carried beyond the confines of the isolator to the public square where workers were gathering for the official May Day demonstration. The perturbed chief warden stuck his head out of the window and ordered the guards to bang with empty tin cans against the iron gate to drown out the orators, but the louder the guards banged the louder the speakers shouted.

The second meeting was organized by the Social Revolutionaries in alliance with the anarchists. In opening it, the chairman called for a minute of silence in tribute to the memories of Zoya Nikitina and Leonid Nikolayev who gave their lives in the struggle against the Stalinist tyranny. Then came speeches by a number of militant orators. Every mention of

Zoya's or Leonid's name was greeted with loud "Hurrahs" which echoed through the isolator.

During the meeting, two Georgians took up positions below our window. Presently, one jumped on the shoulder of the other with the agility and deftness of circus acrobats and shoved a small bundle through the bars of our window. When we unwrapped it, we found four oranges, six bars of chocolate, and a brief note: "Dear women comrades, please don't despair. We are with you and shall protect you!"

We later learned that the chocolate and oranges had been sent through the Red Cross to some of the old prisoners by their friends abroad.

The demonstrations staged by the two remaining groups of prisoners—the Communist Generalists (those who adhered to the party line) and the Communist Oppositionists—were also spirited affairs but they were not so well organized and they seemed to lack a feeling of solidarity.

According to the rules governing pregnant women prisoners, Anya should have been released from the isolator and sent into exile the preceding April. But at the end of May, she was still in prison. The ninth month of her pregnancy was approaching. Anya was disheartened and her strength was giving out. She cried incessantly. I also wept—for her and for myself. At night our wailing must have had a distressing effect on the entire isolator population. The men raised a loud commotion. They pounded on the floor and doors, and demanded decent treatment for the women prisoners.

This was repeated night after night. During one of these stormy nights when the entire isolator was in the throes of mutiny, the old Social Revolutionary prisoner, Kireyev, with whom I had talked just a few months earlier, lost his mind. Standing on his bed with a broomstick in his hand, he kept

banging on the ceiling, shouting exhortations, until he was overpowered by the guards, put in a straitjacket and taken to the hospital, where he soon died.

After the episode of Kireyev, Anya and I were transferred to a small cell on the first floor, far removed from other cells. Our crying could no longer be heard by the rest of the prisoners. However, the men were not fooled by this stratagem and continued their tumultuous protests.

Finally instructions came from Moscow to send Anya by special convoy to the capital for the period of her accouchement. The following day, she left. We parted tearfully. She asked me "to look after" her husband.

Shortly after Anya's departure, orders came to renovate the cell we two had occupied. Accordingly, I had to be moved elsewhere and was put in the cell shared by Gaidcrova and Katya, who greeted me amiably. Theirs happened to be one of the privileged cells. They were permitted to receive newspapers. I was thrilled to see in Gaidcrova's hands a "real, live" paper, *Pravda*, even though it was five months out of date.

"Katya and I have just finished reading the Decree of December 1 revising judicial procedures in political cases," said Gaidcrova. "Would you like to see it? It's an interesting document. No defendant any longer has a right to defend himself, nor is he permitted to appeal for a commutation of sentence. In other words, once you've been trapped by the NKVD, you're finished."

I read the decree out loud. The text was brief but ominously significant:

*Pravda* (No. 334) December 5, 1934: *Decision of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR*

The Central Executive Committee decided:

To introduce the following changes in the existing Criminal Code

of the Union Republics, pertaining to terrorist acts committed against members of the Soviet government:

1. Investigations of these cases are to be completed within a period not exceeding ten days.
2. The indictments are to be handed to the accused one day before the case is examined in court.
3. The case is to be heard without the participation of either side.
4. Neither an appeal for a review of the verdict nor an appeal for commutation of the sentence is to be permitted.
5. A verdict calling for the highest degree of punishment [execution] should be carried out promptly after the announcement of the verdict.

(signed) M. Kalinin, Chairman of the Central  
Executive Committee of the USSR  
A. Yenukidze, Secretary of the Central  
Executive Committee of the USSR  
Moscow, the Kremlin, December 1, 1934.

"Please note," Gaiderova said, "that the decree is not provisional. No. It is intended to remain in force for an indefinite time. Do you realize what that means?"

"Yes, it's a fine law," I replied. "You're not allowed to defend yourself, you're not allowed to appeal for mercy."

"They should have had such a law a long time ago. That might have stopped certain people from inciting stupid youngsters to kill our leaders," muttered Katya, looking narrowly at Gaiderova.

The latter did not reply, though she obviously knew that Katya's innuendo was aimed at her. There was an awkward silence.

"My, oh my!" sighed Katya. "It certainly must be fun these days to work for the NKVD. Too bad I got involved in this stupid mess. Today I'd gladly grab the opportunity to serve in the NKVD. Mirova used to nag me about it. Why don't you drop that dumb job at the Regional Committee, she would



say to me, and come to us where things are always lively and exciting? I didn't listen to her then; now it's too late."

"Did you notice," I said, my mind still on the decree, "the peculiar coincidence? The decree was signed the same day that Kirov was assassinated—December 1, 1934."

"That's the point I've been making all along," said Gaiderova. "Kirov was a restraining influence on Stalin. He steadfastly opposed Stalin's intention to give the Chekists freedom of action. Consequently, the decree which gives the Chekists a free hand coincides in date with the murder of their principal foe."

"And how would you have wanted it?" asked Katya captiously. "Would you have wanted to tie the hands that held the nation's security? Why don't you drop this softheaded, intellectual claptrap? As I see it, if you make a revolution, you have to provide guarantees for its survival. Too many of our so-called responsible comrades are wrecking the revolution. They are doing more harm than paid foreign agents."

I could no longer contain myself. "Katya," I said to her sternly, "how can you slander your own party comrades like that?"

And why not? she wanted to know. If terrorists were punished, then a person like Zinoviev deserved equal treatment, for he had done as much as Churchill himself to undermine Soviet prestige abroad. "Or take Kirov, for that matter. If he hadn't muddied the waters, if he hadn't ridiculed honest party members, no one would have shot him. Good riddance is what I call it. My only regret is that because of that idiot Kirov, I'm stuck here instead of serving with the NKVD."

Anya's release from the isolator gave Katya an idea. Here was palpable proof that pregnancy led to freedom. The next

time the Social Revolutionaries had their walk, Katya—through the window of our cell—engaged them in conversation. She made it unambiguously clear that she would not be averse to gaining her freedom after the manner of Anya.

The Social Revolutionaries took up the idea with alacrity. At a hurriedly assembled meeting, they formally moved that “in view of Nikolayev’s signal service in the struggle against Communist tyranny, his sister’s proposal should be supported, and every effort be made to help her realize her plan.” A young man, Lukyanchikov, volunteered to “collaborate” with Katya in the “project.”

This led to an angry exchange between Gaiderova and Katya.

“What clowns these Social Revolutionaries are!” remarked Gaiderova caustically.

“And the Communists are not clowns!” retorted Katya. “They have destroyed all that’s beautiful in life, and now they are devouring each other like animals. The Communists, huh! They won’t even let you live like a human being.”

Gaiderova was stunned by Katya’s heresy. She didn’t know what to make of it.

In the evening, Katya suddenly seized a stool, and proceeded to bang it against the door. She demanded from the guards an audience with the chief warden. Gaiderova and I became alarmed.

“What’s the matter, Katya?” I pleaded with her. “Are you all right? Is anything wrong? What happened?”

She didn’t reply, but continued to pound on the door.

Finally, the warden appeared. “What’s all this fuss about?” he asked Katya gruffly.

“You’ve got to get me out of this cell. I can’t stand it any longer. I am a loyal party member, and you placed me with

a Zinovievite and a White Guardist. They are persecuting me. I demand to be taken out of this cell."

"Who put you up to this? It wasn't the Social Revolutionaries by any chance?"

"That's not your business. I am a loyal party member and I have a right to be among prisoners who share my political views."

"All right. Wait a while. You'll be transferred later. As soon as the renovations are completed everyone will have a separate cell."

"No. I cannot remain here another minute. I have suffered enough. I can't put up with it any longer. I am a Stalinist and you have no right to force me to stay with women who are hostile to me."

Gaiderova and I looked at each other in amazement.

"Whether you are a Stalinist or not makes little difference in this place," the warden managed to put in.

"You can't do that to me, I shall report you."

"You've all done enough reporting already," he said bitterly, and walked out.

Katya threw herself on the bed and began to cry. We remained silent, still perplexed by her odd behavior. She had been on the friendliest of terms with us earlier in the day. Then after a while she raised her head to say, "Why are you looking at me like that? Oh, well, it would be my hard luck to get myself tied up with women like you."

In the course of the next few days it became apparent to everyone that the romance between the thirty-eight-year-old Katya and the twenty-six-year-old Lukyanchikov was in full bloom. The entire population of the isolator was intently following the affair. Gaiderova, particularly, was beside herself

with joy. "This is wonderful," she said to me. "Katya does not know what a service she is rendering to us Zinovievites. Do you realize its significance?"

"I'm not sure about the service she is rendering the Zinovievites, but I have an idea of the service she is rendering herself."

"That's not it. The fact that the Social Revolutionaries have taken her into their group proves that Lenka was ideologically close to them. Judge for yourself, Liza. You, as a woman, are a hundred times more attractive than Katya. Yet they did not accept you into their ranks. To them you are an alien element. But Katya is regarded by them as one of their own, because Lenka was one of them."

I nodded vaguely, not quite sure that I followed Gaiderova's reasoning.

"And that," she concluded triumphantly, "proves beyond the shadow of any doubt that the Zinovievites had no part in the assassination."

A few days later, while the Social Revolutionary sector was out on its walk, Katya managed to visit Lukyanchikov in his cell. In accordance with a carefully worked out plan, Lukyanchikov did not join his colleagues, but remained behind to await Katya. As soon as the Social Revolutionaries came into the courtyard, Katya had a "violent stomach ache" and demanded to be taken to the doctor, whose office was conveniently located on the same floor as Lukyanchikov's cell. Katya spent a couple of minutes there, then asked permission to go to the lavatory. En route, she sneaked into Lukyanchikov's cell. The guards, however, were alert and unceremoniously broke up the rendezvous.

The following day, when another shift of guards was on

duty, the maneuver was repeated and went off successfully. Subsequently, the guards did uncover "the plot," but by then it was too late—Katya had already become Lukyanchikov's wife *de facto*!

The affair created a furore in the isolator. When the guards tried to drag Katya back to her cell, she scratched and screamed and raised a terrific rumpus. This touched off a general commotion. Prisoners, young and old, banged on doors, shouted, whistled. Noisily we celebrated Katya's "wedding"! The chief warden, finally, gave his pledged word that he would appeal to Moscow for permission to have Katya and Lukyanchikov share the same cell. Only then was the demonstration called off.

Several days went by and there was no reply from Moscow. All the prisoners—except the Communists and myself—decided to declare a hunger strike. During our morning walk, Gaiderova and I were greeted with derisive calls. From the windows in the isolator building came shouts of "Scabs! Strikebreakers!" We hastily retreated from the courtyard.

That evening the chief warden summoned Katya to his office. Their conversation, as she reported it to us on her return, went like this:

"Will you explain to me," he said to Katya sternly, "how you, an old party member, got yourself entangled with a Social Revolutionary? You are a disgrace to the party."

"Don't you try to lecture me," Katya replied insolently. "The party! I can spit on the party. All my life I worked for it. You know damned well I've never done anything against the party. Yet, they put me in jail. Am I to be held responsible for the actions of my grown-up brother? No other government in the world imprisons women for crimes committed by their relatives. But, here, my own party takes my children

away from me and puts me in jail. To hell with that kind of party. I'm joining the Social Revolutionary party. They have treated me like a human being."

"You are a brazen hussy, Katya! A mother of two children, and look how you behave? If you conducted yourself decently, the party would in time forgive you. Our party punishes, but it also forgives."

But Katya was not persuaded.

The hunger strike lasted two days. On the third day, the chief warden received instructions from Moscow to permit Lukyanchikov and Katya Rogacheva to share the same cell. He summoned the pair to his office and informed them that Minister Yagoda of the NKVD had approved and legalized their marriage. Hereafter Katya was to bear the name Nikolayeva-Lukyanchikova.

The Social Revolutionaries were jubilant. Through Katya, they were now brought closer to their hero Leonid Nikolayev both in spirit and body. And Katya, of course, shared their elation. To be sure, her husband—twelve years her junior—was somewhat "too gentle and too intellectual" for Katya's taste—yet there was the prospect of freedom in another seven to eight months! Well worth the effort, she felt.

The prisoners, too, felt triumphant. They had won the hunger strike.

Katya and Lukyanchikov were settled in a cell at the other end of the corridor. They were assigned to another courtyard for their walks. Our contact with them was disrupted for several months. Gaiderova and I remained alone in our cell. It made no sense to me. Anya and her husband Pantiukhin, legally married, were kept apart. But Katya and Lukyanchikov, in their obviously contrived union, were permitted to live together. Such is the higher logic of the NKVD.

## *Chapter IX*

ON ONE OF OUR WALKS, GAIDEROVA INTRODUCED me to a friend of hers, a man named Korshunov, who impressed me as earnest and level-headed. I enjoyed talking with him, and during later meetings in the courtyard, I learned a good deal about him.

Korshunov was in his early fifties, an old-time factory worker from St. Petersburg (now Leningrad). He had been in the Communist party, he told me, since 1919. He had taken part in the storming of the Winter Palace during the October Revolution and was wounded in the fighting. The Soviet government had awarded him the Order of the Red Banner.

However, in 1927, he became active in the Opposition movement in Leningrad, and signed the Declaration of the 121. This led to his exile to the Don Basin. Five years later, through the intercession of Kirov, Korshunov was permitted to return to Leningrad and was admitted as a student to the Stalin Industrial Academy.

To my surprise, I discovered that Korshunov was one of the eyewitnesses of Kirov's assassination.

"I had been invited to attend a meeting of Leningrad party-activists at the Smolny that day," he told me. "When I arrived at the entrance, a few minutes early, I was made to

queue up with other delegates whose papers were being checked by Zaporozhets of the NKVD."

Ahead of Korshunov in the line of waiting delegates was Nikolayev who, despite the wintry weather, wore a leather jacket. Eventually, their papers having been found to be in order, the two men were admitted to the building and went upstairs. Korshunov turned into Chudov's office, where Kirov and others were gathered talking, while Nikolayev lingered at the top of the stairway, explaining that he had to wait for someone.

Soon Zaporozhets joined the group in Chudov's office, to suggest that it was time for the meeting to begin. To this Kirov replied, "Let's wait a little longer." Then he left the room to cross the corridor to his own office. He was alone. His bodyguard was not with him.

Barely a half-minute elapsed when two shots rang out in the corridor. By the time Korshunov and the others arrived there, the corridor was empty except for Kirov and Nikolayev stretched out on the floor with bloodied heads. Beside them lay the Nagan revolver.

Korshunov was one of those who dashed down the stairway in pursuit of the assassin. But they found no assassin, only delegates arriving for the meeting. So they turned back and hurried upstairs to aid the wounded men.

"The first thing I noticed when we returned," Korshunov said, "was that Lenka was not lying in the same place where we had left him, and that there was a fresh pool of blood near him. I helped carry Kirov into his office. It was in my arms that he died."

None of those present, according to Korshunov, could figure out at first who shot whom. Did Nikolayev shoot Kirov, or did Kirov shoot Nikolayev? The official communiqué is-



sued by the government the next day did not disclose the name of the assailant. It was only much later that the NKVD announced that the "criminal-assassin" of Kirov was an RKI employee named Leonid Nikolayev.

"Mind you," said Korshunov, "no mention was made of the fact that the assassin was a member of the Communist party."

I asked if subsequent communiqués had shed any more light on the assassination. Korshunov said No, that if anything they tried to obscure the facts. And he cited as evidence a communiqué appearing in *Pravda*, on December 4, in which it was stated that "The assassin was apprehended there and then." As if Nikolayev had been in a condition to attempt escape.

I remarked that Nikolayev must have been a man of singular will, to have shot himself, and slash his throat after he came to.

"Yes," Korshunov agreed. "But you mustn't forget that he was by no means normal. He was an epileptic and given to irrational deeds. The person I'm sorry for is Kirov. He was a great man and deserved a better fate."

When I expressed interest, acknowledging that I knew little about Kirov in spite of my connection with the case, he went on to say that he had known Kirov well. "It may surprise you that as recently as five or six years ago, Kirov was an intransigent party-liner. He believed that the Five-Year Plan had to be carried out regardless of human sacrifice. He favored the liquidation of the kulaks, and with his moral support untold thousands were condemned to slave labor. Kirov was also merciless in crushing the Zinovievite opposition. One can't deny these facts. They are part of the record."

"In other words," I said, "Kirov was not the saintly person his friends would have us believe."

Kirov had changed in recent years, Korshunov offered in his defense. With the completion of the first Five-Year Plan, he began to feel with men like Kalinin (Chairman of the Central Executive Committee), Kuibishev (of the Politburo), and Maxim Gorky that the time had come for a gradual relaxation of the dictatorship. It was Kirov's contention that the class enemy within the country had been crushed, that there was no longer any internal threat to the security of the Soviet state. Consequently, there was no point in maintaining longer a huge secret police organization. He proposed abandoning the dictatorship of the proletariat and laying the groundwork for a democratic society. He also advocated an end to intraparty strife and called for a reconciliation with the Zinovievites, Trotskyists, and other Oppositionists.

"It was because of Kirov that many exiled Oppositionists were permitted to return to Leningrad; some like myself were enrolled in universities, others were assigned to responsible party work."

Kirov, so Korshunov told me, devoted much time to the training of a "technical intelligentsia"—engineers and technicians. He recruited the most capable Komsomol and party members for study at technical schools and provided them with subsidies and comfortable living conditions. He himself was surrounded by intelligent, devoted party members whom he was grooming for commanding posts in the nation's political and economic life. Inevitably, word of his activities spread. At party conferences he was hailed by Communists who shared his views, and there was a particularly tumultuous ovation given him by the delegates to the Seventeenth party Congress held in the Kremlin in January, 1934—an ovation which nearly equaled that accorded to Stalin himself.

"From that time on, Kirov was a marked man. Stalin began to urge him to move into the Kremlin and devote himself

entirely to Politburo work, saying that he was needed to help counteract the unwholesome tendencies manifested by Bukharin and Kuibishev."

Though Kirov "agreed in principle," he showed little inclination to accept Stalin's offer. There were several reasons Korshunov could think of. One was Kirov's wife—"a quaint, gentle little woman, frail and gray, surrounded with flowers and fondling two poodles, a woman resembling a marchioness." One of the local papers had published a *feuilleton* ridiculing a "little lady and her poodles." Though no name was mentioned, there was no mistaking who the person was and the Kirovs could not help but realize that the *feuilleton* constituted a warning signal.

Another reason for Kirov's reluctance to leave Leningrad could have been the illness of his illegitimate son. The boy, Seryozha, had been ailing all that year and Kirov wished to remain close by.

So, on the pretext of having unfinished work in Leningrad, Kirov put off from month to month his departure for Moscow. Until in November, just a few weeks before the assassination, Stalin ordered him to wind up his affairs and take over the new post in the Kremlin.

"I have no idea," Korshunov finished, "how it all would have ended if fate had not stepped in. Apparently, Kirov was destined to die in Leningrad. And with him perished most of his friends and disciples."

Late in June, 1935, we had a newcomer in the isolator, a Communist named Mikhail Bushnev who had been transferred from the political isolator in Upper-Uralsk. From him Gaiderova learned that Kamenev and Zinoviev had been summoned to Moscow, and among others incarcerated in the Upper-Uralsk Isolator was someone called Alexander Slepko,

a leading member of the Bukharin opposition group, whom Gaiderova apparently knew quite well.

Bushnev told Gaiderova that Slepkov looked fine, was in high spirits, and carried himself with great dignity. Whereupon Gaiderova broke into tears and wept like a little girl. She cried late into the night.

The next day, she poured her heart out to me.

Alexander Slepkov, she told me, was a brilliant young economist whom she had met in Leningrad in 1929, a highly gifted person, a man of great erudition. It was he who had tutored Nadezhda Allilueva, Stalin's wife, and prepared her for the entrance examinations to the university. Stalin was intrigued by this promising young Communist scholar and enjoyed listening to him on his frequent visits to the Stalin home.

In 1929, Slepkov was invited to Leningrad by Kirov. He was appointed associate professor of economics at the Sverdlov University, where Gaiderova held the post of assistant rector. Slepkov was assigned quarters in the faculty house where Gaiderova also lived, and they met often.

"He was a most attractive man," Gaiderova said, "with a generous soul, and a gentle, friendly manner. In short, I fell deeply in love with him. My first love. And despite what happened later I shall always be indebted to him for the two glorious years he gave me."

Tears welled up in her eyes, and it was a moment before she could go on.

"We broke up on the eve of his departure to the North Caucasus where he was being sent on an academic mission. The break came about in an ugly, disgraceful manner. I was forty-nine years old, and I was bearing his child—my first one. My joy was boundless. Despite the warnings from the doc-

tors, I refused to have an abortion, but insisted upon going through with the childbirth.

"The confinement at a maternity hospital proved inordinately difficult. I suffered excruciating labor pains—you can imagine, giving birth at my age. The infant died. Alexander, at that time, was greatly preoccupied with his forthcoming journey. Still, he would call on me at the hospital, now and then, to inquire about my health. On one of these visits, he was given the corpse of his son for burial. When he arrived home with it he didn't know what to do, so fetched a shoe box and put the little body in it, then placed the box on his desk and went about his work. Several days passed and the body began to decompose. Then Alexander, attracted by the odor from the box, recalled that he had not buried the child. Whereupon he took the box with the dead infant in it and threw it into the garbage can. . . . Later, when he called at the hospital to take me home, he told me what had happened."

I exclaimed in horror. "But why did he take the dead child home?" I asked. "Usually the hospital takes care of the burial."

"I don't know," Gaiderova replied, "but you can imagine how I felt. I had never been so hurt in my life. Something snapped within me. I felt shamed and demeaned."

After that there was a quarrel and Alexander left for Rostov-on-the-Don. Gaiderova never saw him again. She heard in time that he had joined the ranks of the Right-Deviationists, and that he was exiled in 1932.

Thoughtfully, Gaiderova added, "As I look back on it, I can't say that Alexander was callous or cynical. No. It was simply that he had no time for the minutiae of life. His head was always filled with loftier thoughts."

## *Chapter X*

IN JULY, 1935, ORDERS CAME TO HAVE GAIDEROVA sent by special convoy to Moscow for a review of her case. She was beside herself with joy.

"You see, I told you, things are returning to normal," she said as she packed her meager belongings with shaking hands. "I expected as much. I never lost confidence in Soviet justice."

It couldn't be otherwise, she asserted. The case had to be reviewed. In the final analysis, Moscow had to realize that the Zinovievites were in no way connected with the Kirov assassination. It was proof that the Kremlin had finally come to its senses and the blood bath was over. "Whew!" she let her breath out in an exaggerated sigh. "I feel as if a load had been taken off my shoulders. After all, the sound intelligence of Lenin's party has asserted itself. The police-state tendencies in the party have been curbed."

Tenderly we embraced and said good-by. It was a moving and even happy occasion for me too, for Gaiderova's departure bolstered my own hope of freedom.

Alone in the cell, I felt greatly relieved. It had been a long time since I had been by myself, free of the presence of strangers, of people who were alien to me in spirit and in thought.

Now I could relax, rest, arrange my thoughts. My mood improved accordingly.

However, the mood did not last. By the end of the week I was tired of my seclusion and agonizingly lonely. I felt neglected, unwanted, forgotten. One reason for this, I am sure, was the fact that I was assigned to take my walk with the four very decrepit old men who belonged to the Monarchist sector. There were only four of them in the isolator, all of them in their sixties and hardly stimulating company. They had been in prison for many years, since 1921-1922, and in innumerable isolators. They looked like walking mummies as they paced the courtyard stiffly, hardly exchanging any remarks with each other or with me. Although they were cordial, in their company I felt as isolated and forsaken as in my solitary cell.

Then, a month later, a new group arrived at the isolator. They were old Bolsheviks, members of the Society of Former Political Prisoners. Newcomers were always an event, but these behaved strangely. They kept apart from the rest of us. They complained loudly about the food, the absence of reading matter, the harshness of the isolator administration. Several were assigned to the same exercise period as myself, and among them was an elderly woman. Since we were the only women in the group, we naturally drew together and soon became acquainted.

She was Yadwiga Bogutskaya, of whom I had heard before—a veteran Communist party member and participant in the 1905 Revolution. In recent years, she had headed the propaganda sector of the Leningrad Regional Committee of the party. Prior to that, she was in charge of the youth movement in the Vyborg District, in Leningrad.

"In that case," I suggested, "you must be a Zinovievite?"

"Oh, no. I am an unswerving Generalist," she replied with a smile. "I never belonged to any opposition group."

To my question "Then why were you arrested?" she said that it was because she had protested the disbanding of the Society of Former Political Prisoners.

I was astounded. This society was extremely influential. The members had been accorded every honor and privilege within the power of the party to bestow. It was impossible that it had been disbanded.

"Yes," said Bogutskaya with a sigh. "We were once the revered veterans of the revolution. But all that changed with Kirov's assassination. It happened almost overnight. First there was the execution of the fourteen young men, then several of our members were executed, charged with conspiring to commit terrorist acts against government officials. Finally our society was outlawed as counterrevolutionary."

But why? I wanted to know. What had they done?

"Nothing that we need to be ashamed of," was her answer. "We had fought against Czarist tyranny and we weren't going to sit idly by and watch the growth of Stalinist tyranny. All of us, to a man, voiced our protests and called for an end to the Red terror. That's why we were punished."

Several had acted as ringleaders, she said—Avdeyev, Gusev and his wife, Lobov, herself, and others. The Gusevs had written to their old friend Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, urging her to use her influence with Stalin, but this had had no effect at all of the sort desired.

"The result was that Avdeyev and I were arrested and sent to this isolator, the Gusevs were shipped off to Krasnoyarsk, and Lobov died of a heart attack while being interrogated by the NKVD in Leningrad."

I told Bogutskaya that I did not think she would be kept



here long, and explained that they had already begun to review the Kirov and Zinoviev cases. Everything, including Gaiderova's leaving, pointed to an early end of the representations.

"Is that right?" she said, and repeated that she and her comrades in the society had sent protest after protest to the Central Committee appealing to their sense of justice, to their conscience. She seemed to assume that the one was a consequence of the other.

We discussed conditions in the isolator, and the character of the chief warden, whom she called a petty despot. The day before, he had brought her group together and demanded an end to their griping and protests—to which they replied that they had known better conditions in Czarist jails.

"A contemptible type. I can't understand how such people ever got into the Soviet government service," she declared.

We were joined by an elderly man of fine bearing and a pleasant face whom Bogutskaya introduced as Avdeyev. He was much exercised over the discovery that members of their society were resented around the isolator. "We're being boycotted. The prisoners refuse to talk with us. I don't understand it," he said aggrievedly.

"Well, what did you expect?" Bogutskaya answered. "Only six months ago we were the very pillar of the Stalinist regime. Can you blame them for resenting us? It's only natural that they should."

Avdeyev did not agree. "We are old revolutionaries and they should take that into consideration." Then he left us.

Watching him go, Bogutskaya said, "There is a truly great man. He has been the president of our society for many years. What an orator! He could keep an audience spellbound for hours. And look what's become of him. It's heart-breaking."

I asked if he were the same Avdeyev whose revolver figured in the Kirov case, and she told me he was.

"It would be interesting," I said, "to hear his side of the story—how the revolver disappeared and how he learned that it was gone."

She promised that she would get him to tell us about it when he was in a better mood, possibly the next day. For she too was curious.

Soon after this, during a walk, we joined Avdeyev and brought the conversation around to the missing revolver. He was quite willing to talk, but obviously he was as baffled by the mystery as anyone.

"The devil alone knows how my Nagan disappeared," he said. "To be sure, I never carried it on me. It hung on the wall near my desk. It hung there inside the holster for perhaps five years. I never cleaned it and never fired a shot out of it."

Once, he recalled, a long time ago, he had examined it. It was covered with rust and he debated cleaning it, then decided to put off the chore for another time.

Soon afterward Kirov was assassinated and an order was given that all Communists possessing arms bring them to the NKVD with their permits. Avdeyev was getting ready to report his Nagan when he noticed that the holster was empty. He turned the apartment upside down—no trace of the revolver anywhere. He made inquiries among friends who had visited his apartment—no one knew anything about it.

"What was I to do?" he said. "I had to go to the NKVD with cap in hand."

But when he got there and told the officials what had happened, they had a surprise for him. "Don't worry," they told him. "We've found your Nagan." And they showed him a

revolver that looked exactly like his own, except that it was cleaned and highly polished.

"I was delighted. It was a load off my shoulders, I can tell you." Still, when he looked at the weapon closely, he thought, "Who knows? Maybe it's mine, maybe it isn't." It seemed to be too well-polished.

Suspicious, he suggested that the number on the revolver be checked against the number on his permit. This met with no favor. "Can't you tell your own revolver without looking at the number?" they asked accusingly. "We happen to know that this is yours."

He was more suspicious than ever now and insisted that the numbers be compared, only to learn that the factory markings and number had been filed off of the Nagan he held.

"Since there was no number on it, naturally I refused ownership," he said, and added heatedly: "Do you see what they were up to? They tried to palm off on me the revolver with which Nikolayev had shot Kirov. Can you imagine anything more dastardly?"

Later, when Avdeyev had left us, Bogutskaya remarked, "I can't tell you how sorry I am for him. Poor man! You have no idea what he went through. His wife, who was also an old Bolshevik and had spent many years in Czarist jails, died from an apoplectic stroke when the NKVD raided their apartment. The Chekists wouldn't allow Avdeyev even to go to her funeral. He had to remain in jail while his wife was buried in some unknown cemetery. That's the kind of thing that is happening in our party these days. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes," I replied wryly, "I'm beginning to understand a little."

The summer in Chelyabinsk was drawing to an end. Sunny days were becoming more and more rare. September was approaching. No sign of any change as far as my status was concerned.

For two days in succession we had not been permitted to take our walks. I knocked on the door and asked the guard why the walks had been canceled.

"It's forbidden," he said. "Some angry big shots arrived from Moscow. They are interrogating the prisoners. This is no time for walks. You ought to be thankful you're still in one piece."

The guard was an old "friend" of mine. On several occasions, I had presented him with soap and thread which I had bought at the isolator canteen. He had a large family to support and appreciated these gifts.

It was seldom that he was on duty inside the isolator. He was usually assigned to chores away from the cells. Being a talkative and simple-minded chap, he was not trusted near the prisoners, for fear that he might reveal some official secret.

Once I heard the warden reprimand him severely. "If you don't know how to hold your tongue," he was warned, "stay away from the cells. The people sitting there are not your kinsmen. They are counters.\* Do you understand? Counters. You have to be careful what you tell them. So don't be a fat-head."

The admonition apparently had little effect on the guard or he would not today have babbled out the news about the arrival of the Moscow officials.

Had these men come here to review our cases? Had they been authorized to order the release of those found innocent?

\* Soviet slang for counterrevolutionists.

At two in the morning I was awakened by an inspector.

"You're wanted for questioning. Hurry up."

"What has happened? Can't it hold till morning?" I protested. But I wasted my breath.

"Come along," he said, "there's no time for explanations. The investigator from Moscow wants to see you at once."

*My turn has come at last. . . . They are reviewing my case. . . . Maybe they'll dismiss it for lack of evidence. These thoughts rushed through my head.*

With mounting hope I hastened toward the office.

The investigator with a weary expression on his face regarded me coldly. "What's your name?" he muttered. "What? . . . That's right. Well, to make it brief, I've come from Moscow to wind up your case."

"I am delighted to hear that. I've long awaited this day," I exclaimed, unable to control my elation.

The investigator looked quizzically at me. "You have filed a protest asserting that you are being held in prison without having been told the verdict of the court. You have also gone on hunger strikes. . . ."

*What is he talking about? Hunger strikes? I have never resorted to a hunger strike.*

"I am therefore obliged to inform you," he continued, "that until you sign the testimony you gave at the preliminary hearings, which is recorded in these protocols, you will not be apprised of the verdict."

I asked him how long this could keep up, to which he replied, "It may be ten years for all we care."

"In that case I am prepared to wait ten years."

This wouldn't do, he declared. I must sign the protocols now. And when I refused he went on to lecture me about

using hunger strikes as a method of protest. It was action against the party and the government. It was counterrevolution, deliberate and premeditated.

From his manner, from his automaton-like mouthing of official phrases, it was clear that he wasn't familiar with my case at all. Reluctantly, I had to acknowledge that he couldn't possibly be authorized to review my case; least of all did he have the power to dismiss the charges against me.

"You told me," I said, interrupting his flow of memorized phrases, "that you have been commissioned to wind up my case. But you go about it in a peculiar way. Is it your intention to close the case by having me sign the protocols?"

"Why, naturally. Sign the protocols and you can go back to sleep."

*What a stupid face he has! Petty officials of his type are never given important assignments, I thought.*

Wearily I said to him, "It's no use. I shan't sign anything for you. These protocols should have been torn up a long time ago, and I should have been released. And you should be occupying yourself with work more useful to the nation."

This provoked a charge of insolence, and again he advised me to sign, name my accomplices, disclose my contacts. The interrogation continued in this fashion until four o'clock. I didn't sign anything. As a result, I was ordered kept under the strictest discipline.

For the rest of the night, I could not sleep. The realization that Moscow apparently had no intention of reviewing my case threw me into new depths of depression. I was abandoned, forgotten by everyone, unwanted, rejected, an alien element. To the powers in Moscow my case was so insignificant that they had sent this stupid petty official who didn't

even take the trouble to familiarize himself with the facts. What hope could there be for me?

Out of dejection I wept bitterly and in the still of the night my lament must have been heard in the other cells for there was an immediate and vociferous response. From all sides came loud outcries:

"Stop tormenting the woman!"

"You torturers, you bloody inquisitors!"

These expressions of solidarity touched me and drove me, uncontrollably, into louder wails. This, in turn, intensified the commotion raised by the prisoners. In their outcries they gave vent to their own grievances, to the feeling of discontent common to all of us in the isolator.

"We demand an end to the savage treatment of prisoners!"

"Call off your reign of terror!"

The guards and the warden remained unmoved.

The prisoners were now pounding with their stools against the doors and the floor. The commotion was taking on the proportions of a riot. As dawn broke, the entire isolator was in an uproar. There were clanging noises, yells, poundings, the crashing of window panes.

Directly above my cell the Trotskyist, Gavrilov, was at his window exhorting the prisoners to declare a hunger strike in protest against the Stalinist terror.

The guards at the tower fired warning shots, but the commotion did not subside. If anything, it gained in force. Finally, the officials of the isolator, unable to cope with the situation, called out the municipal fire-fighting brigades. It was only after the firemen began to shoot streams of water from dozens of hoses into the open cell windows that the rioting quieted down a bit.

As the clamor abated, the inspector and one of the guards

burst into my cell, grabbed me, and dragged me off to the warden's office. I resisted, screaming with all my strength. At the office, the assistant chief warden awaited me. The chief warden was on vacation.

"What are you raising this racket for?" he demanded. "Why all the wailing and weeping? Aren't you being treated well? Has the administration been cruel to you? Have we been forcing you to work? No? Then why are you inciting the isolator to rebellion?"

I explained that I was crying because I didn't want to stay there, that I didn't know the reason for my being kept there and why wasn't my case being reviewed, justly and fairly?"

"Oh, so that's it! In that case, you're wasting your time. It's too late to weep now. You should have thought of that before. You knew what you were letting yourself in for. You wanted to rule the government, now you have to pay for it."

"What government?" I retorted. "I never wanted to rule anything. Why do you say such nonsense?"

But he assured me that "they" knew all about it. "Don't try to fool us. We weren't born yesterday. Look, little lady, let me give you some sound advice: instead of fussing and fuming, why don't you try to repent and atone for the crimes you have committed. Pull yourself together, get used to conditions here, behave in an orderly manner, and you'll be better off."

There was more of the same. Then he ordered the inspector to take me to the doctor for something to quiet my nerves. Afterward he was to make the rounds of the cells and quiet the mutineers. "Tell them," the assistant warden added, "that the little woman was crying because she had a toothache. Now that her tooth has been pulled she is all right again."



I was received cordially by the doctor, a kindly old man. After making me lie down on the couch and feeling my pulse, he told me, "Your nerves are upset. I won't give any morphine this time. I want you to take some valcrian drops. How long have you been in this isolator?"

"Eight months," I replied.

"Only eight months? And already you have upset yourself so much. I don't advise it, my dear. One mustn't give in to despair. It is a dangerous thing to do."

I explained to him that I'd feel less disturbed if I knew what my sentence was or even the reason for my imprisonment.

Apologetically, he pointed out that he, of course, could do nothing about that. It was beyond his power. All he could do was try to teach me how to conduct myself so as to preserve my mental equilibrium.

Things were different in the past, he told me. He had been on duty in this isolator since 1921. In former years, conditions were much better. Yet many emotionally unstable and sensitive people cracked up and became psychotic. No amount of medical attention could save them.

I could not reconcile the two statements. If conditions were so good, why did some of the prisoners break down?

One could not ask for better conditions, the doctor assured me. Each prisoner was on an individually prescribed diet. The cells were aired regularly, and remained unlocked in the daytime. There were fresh flowers in every cell.

"Flowers!" I exclaimed. "Where are the flowers now?"

"They were removed only recently to the shed, after Kirov's assassination."

But the flowers weren't everything, he went on. The prisoners were permitted to engage in sports, in organized com-

petitive games. They spent the major part of the day in literary, scientific, and artistic work. They studied music, sang in the choir. There were many activities to occupy them.

"But, mind you, many of them, nonetheless, ended up badly—those who could not reconcile themselves to confinement. After all, no matter what luxuries are provided, a jail is a jail. Yes, the important thing, my dear, is to learn to accept things philosophically—calmly and serenely."

"I shall try," I said without much conviction.

"That's good!" the doctor replied. "Take these drops and rest here for a while. With God's help, you ought to be able to relax."

I remained in his office for perhaps a half-hour. During that interval, the doctor was summoned twice to the main bloc of cells on "urgent calls."

The inspector who escorted me back to my cell spoke loudly as we passed the corridors, reasoning with me and admonishing me audibly enough for the prisoners to hear.

There was a tense stillness in the isolator.

As punishment for the "unprovoked riot," all sectors, including the Communist one, were deprived of the right to take their walk that day. On the next scheduled walk I learned of the consequences of our demonstration. Avdeyev, the president of the Society of Former Political Prisoners, had died of a heart attack; Rudnev, the Menshevik, had gone insane; and the Trotskyist Gavrilov sustained serious injuries in a scuffle with the guards.

## *Chapter X I*

FOLLOWING THE DISTURBANCE AT THE ISOLATOR, Bogutskaya took ill and stayed away from the walks. My elderly companions—the Monarchists—were also ailing. Thus for several days I had to wander about the courtyard by myself.

One day a man was added to my exercise shift. He was an old-time prisoner, Gavriil Volkov, a Communist. Heretofore he had been allowed to take his walks only in solitude. I had seen his stoop-shouldered figure many times through the window of my cell as he paced alone the deserted courtyard. Even though he was located just two cells from mine, I never had had the opportunity to exchange a word with him. He had a frightened and, at the same time, frightening look. There was something about him that discouraged communication. There were rumors that he was being held in "strictest isolation," accountable directly to the Kremlin. But no one actually knew what case he was involved in nor why he had been imprisoned.

During our first walk together, he came up to me and inquired whether I really had had a toothache the other day. No, I replied. That was the assistant warden's invention. He said that he had suspected as much. However, he added, the recent demonstration had benefited him personally. For

months he had pleaded with the officials to allow him to join other prisoners during the walks. But they wouldn't hear of it. After the demonstration, he renewed his request and the assistant warden—because he feared another demonstration during his chief's absence—granted him permission to take his walks in the company of other prisoners for a limited period. To Volkov's pleasure, he chose our shift since it was the smallest and calmest.

It developed from my conversation with Volkov that he knew I was one of the defendants of the Kirov case. According to him, he had frequently observed me from the window of his cell because I reminded him of a person very dear to him whom he had left behind in Moscow. His former fiancée.

We fell into a lengthy conversation. He told me that he was an Old Bolshevik, that he had taken part in the Bolshevik uprising in Moscow in 1917. Until 1923 he was employed in the Kremlin as the manager of a dining room that was maintained there for the high-up party functionaries. Later he became the chef at the Kremlin sanatorium in Gorki. Two of his brothers held important posts under Mikoyan in the Ministry of Food. Volkov had been arrested and brought here from Silver Pines in 1932. He had just passed his "third anniversary" at the isolator.

To my usual questions regarding his term of imprisonment and reason for imprisonment, he gave surprising replies. He didn't know the term of sentence; as for the reason for his imprisonment, he could only guess. He was never tried. No one had ever interrogated him.

"Not only was I never interrogated but no official was even permitted to discuss my case with me." In answer to my shocked surprise, he explained that persons connected in any way with the Kremlin who fell into disfavor were seldom

interrogated or tried. Usually they are sentenced in *absentia*.

"This may amaze you," he said, "but I was actually glad to be put in prison. I was that eager to be out of the Kremlin. The atmosphere there was too oppressive. You can't imagine how grim and horrible."

The days went by. During the first few walks, Volkov was gay and ebullient. He behaved like a man on a holiday at some fashionable resort. It was apparent that he wanted to use every moment of this time in renewing contact with living people. It was noticeable too that he sought me out more frequently than he did the other prisoners, who from time to time joined us, and his conversations with me were always of an intimate and confidential nature.

Then as his time of reprieve was drawing to an end, he became morose again. When he came out for his last walk with us, he appeared to be in a profoundly dejected state. After circling the courtyard a couple of times by himself, he walked over to me in a determined manner.

He spoke breathlessly, as if he had given much thought to what he was saying.

"For a period of eleven years I have been carrying sealed within my heart a deep secret. I haven't disclosed it to a living soul."

"Then perhaps you shouldn't reveal it to me either," I said uneasily.

"No," he protested. "I feel that I shall not have another opportunity to converse freely with a living person. What's more, I know that I shall never get out of here alive. I must tell you my story. . . ."

When Lenin became ill in 1923, Volkov went on to say, it was decided to hospitalize him in the Kremlin sanatorium at

Gorki. Volkov was sent there to serve as Lenin's personal chef. Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, approved of Volkov's selection for she had known him in the Kremlin as a trusted and thoroughly dependable person.

There was much work for him. Single-handed, he had to prepare and serve meals for Lenin, Lenin's wife, and Lenin's physicians. He worked nearly a year, without taking a day off for rest or vacation, conscious of his obligation to help speed the recovery of the leader of the party. Lenin and his wife showed that they appreciated Volkov's devotion.

Though Lenin did not feel too well, his physicians had promised to have him on his feet again soon. At times he showed some improvement and he would then come out on the terrace to sun himself. Every now and then he had visitors. A few times, Stalin came down to Gorki to see him. But for the most part, Lenin was alone, except for Nadezhda Krupskaya.

All went well for a while. It seemed that Lenin's condition gave no cause for alarm. Then toward the end of the year, shortly before New Year's—it was a bitter winter, Volkov recalled—Nadezhda Krupskaya was unexpectedly summoned to Moscow on urgent business. She was detained there for two days, and during her absence Lenin's health took a drastic turn for the worse.

"When Krupskaya returned and saw Lenin, she gasped. That's how bad he looked. Naturally, special treatments were prescribed and soon he improved. Everyone felt relieved, life returned to normal."

About ten days later Nadezhda Krupskaya was called back to the Kremlin on some party matter. This time she stayed longer, and Lenin again took a turn for the worse. When Volkov was bringing him his tea one morning, Lenin seemed

very upset. He couldn't speak. He made signs to Volkov but Volkov couldn't figure out what he wanted. There was no one in the room except the two of them. Volkov asked him, "Shall I call the doctor?" Lenin shook his head in an emphatic no and continued to gesture. Only after long questioning did Volkov finally gather what Lenin wanted. He was asking Volkov to get through somehow to the Kremlin, tell Krupskaya that he was feeling worse, and ask her to drop everything and return to Gorki. Lenin warned Volkov not to telephone to Krupskaya, but to see her in person.

"Needless to say," Volkov continued, "I made every effort to do as he asked, but I couldn't get out of Gorki. For one thing, a severe snowstorm blew up and made all the roads impassable, by foot or car. And, more important, Stalin phoned from the Kremlin and ordered all physicians as well as the entire staff at Gorki to remain at their posts until the health of 'our dearly beloved Comrade Lenin' is improved. In short, Nadezhda Krupskaya did not return from the Kremlin, and Lenin's condition grew worse and worse until he was no longer able to get out of bed."

And then on January 21, 1924 . . . At eleven in the morning, as usual, Volkov took Lenin his second breakfast. There was no one in his room. As soon as Volkov appeared, Lenin made an effort to rise, and extended both his hands, uttering unintelligible sounds. Volkov rushed over to him and Lenin slipped a note into his hand.

As Volkov turned, having hidden the note, Dr. Elistratov, Lenin's personal physician, ran into the room, apparently having been attracted by the commotion. The two of them got Lenin back to bed and gave him an injection to calm him. Lenin quieted down, his eyes half-closed. He never opened them again.

The note, scratched in a nervous scrawl, read: "Gavrilushka, I've been poisoned . . . go fetch Nadya at once . . . tell Trotsky . . . tell everyone you can."

"Two questions," Volkov said, "have troubled me all these years. Did Elistratov see Lenin give me that note? And if he did, did he inform Stalin? These questions have ruined my peace, poisoned my existence. I have felt every minute that my life is hanging on a thread."

"How frightful!" I exclaimed.

"Later on, I ran into Dr. Elistratov a few times, but we never exchanged a word. We merely looked at each other, that was all. I thought I detected in his eyes the same torment of a deeply hidden secret. I may be wrong, but he seemed a slave of his secret like myself. What became of him, I don't know—he soon disappeared from Gorki."

Volkov paused. "Alas," he said after a moment, "I never carried out Lenin's request. I told no one of the note. You are the first."

Volkov's face was distorted from an effort to restrain his emotions, and I myself was considerably shaken by his revelations.

"You might ask me why I have remained silent so long," he said. "Believe me, it wasn't only the fear that Stalin would have me shot. I knew that in order to suppress the truth about Lenin's death, he would not hesitate to destroy my relatives, my friends, and acquaintances—all those whom he might suspect of knowing my secret. That's why my lips have been sealed. I even stopped seeing my fiancée, so as not to place her life in jeopardy."

When the walk period ended that morning Volkov took me to the door of my cell. And I never saw him again.



## *Chapter X I I*

NEW PEOPLE APPEARED AT OUR DAILY WALKS. I recall the historians Kizrin, Astrov, Nevsky, and Nikolaenko. There were others whom I never did get to know very well. Also, the Lukyanchikov "couple." Katya was noticeably pregnant.

Bogutskaya and I were standing at one end of the courtyard one day, discussing the death of Allilueva, Stalin's wife, when Katya joined us, rushing over in her usual impetuous way and plunging right into the conversation without preliminaries.

"I shall never forget the excitement that Allilueva's sudden death stirred up in my district in Leningrad," Katya exclaimed. "Everyone assumed that for Stalin's wife there would be an official period of mourning, memorial meetings, and so forth. We waited and waited, but nothing happened. The newspapers didn't even tell what she had died of. How? Where? Why? Not a word."

People came to Katya and to other party functionaries to ask the cause of Allilueva's death. But no one knew the answer. They went to the Regional Committee to inquire how to handle the situation, and presently directives came. Party officials were instructed to tell the people that Allilueva had died of acute appendicitis. They were to explain that the

obituaries had omitted the information in order to spare the government embarrassment abroad. Foreigners were apt to ridicule Soviet medical science for permitting the Leader's wife to die of such a trivial cause.

This was in the Vyborg District. A different directive was received in the Putilov District, where the people were told that Allilueva had died of an unsuccessful abortion.

"In the end," said Katya, "we decided to say that Allilueva's death was due to two causes—appendicitis and abortion. I don't know whether the workers believed us or not. At any rate, soon another directive came, ordering us not to discuss the matter at all, and to report to the NKVD the names of people who persisted in asking questions about Allilueva's death."

Thereupon, according to Katya, hundreds of anonymous letters poured into the Regional Committee demanding to know: "Why aren't we told the truth about Nadezhda Allilueva's death? . . . What dark secret are you keeping from the people? . . . Who murdered Allilueva? . . . Are you afraid to tell us the truth?"

When we had exhausted the subject of Allilueva's death, I asked Katya how she happened to be taking her walk in our courtyard. Had she been transferred to our sector?

"Oh, no," she replied. "It's my Lukyanchikov, the lamb, who managed to arrange this. He has talked the warden into allowing us to come here Sundays. It got awfully tiresome seeing the same dull faces in our sector, day in and day out. Now we'll be coming here as your guests, so to speak, each Sunday. That's much more interesting."

"Of course," I agreed.

"Well, excuse me, I must return to my lamb . . . see how lonely he looks? He can't spare me for a minute. What a

simpleton I picked, God help me. Good-by. See you next Sunday." And off she went.

I had noticed that while Katya was with us, Bogutskaya had not said a word to her. This struck me as odd since I knew that the two women had worked closely together in the party since the days of the October Revolution.

"To get back to the subject of Allilueva," she said now, "I can attest from my own experience that her death was certainly shrouded in mystery and caused wide speculation. I was in charge of propaganda at the Regional Committee, and it was my task to cope with this problem. The official information we received was meager and confusing."

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "but is Katya still being boycotted by the Communists in the isolator?"

"You mean because I did not talk to her? Well, my dear, one was always careful what one said within earshot of Katya or Lenka. They could not be trusted. They were too closely tied up with the Chekists. . . . In this instance, however, Katya is right. No one in the party organization knew the cause of Allilueva's death—was it sickness, an accident, or an unsuccessful operation? Nor did we know where she died—was it in Moscow? If so, did she die in the Kremlin or in the hospital?"

Understandably, the lack of a straightforward and plausible explanation of Allilueva's death gave rise to all sorts of rumors.

"What puzzles me," I remarked, "is why the NKVD is still interested in these rumors. Since my arrest, I must have been questioned at least a dozen times about Allilueva."

"They questioned me, too, about her," said Bogutskaya. "Perhaps," she added, "where there is smoke, there is fire."

The night of October 30 was one of the most horrible I

have ever spent. I was awakened by a knock on my door and a loud voice shouting in the corridor, "Good-by, my dear neighbor. I'm being taken to Moscow. I know what that means. Good-by, my dear. Farewell, comrades, friends."

"Good-by, Volkov. Don't get discouraged. God willing, we shall meet again," I called back, although I did not feel the hope I professed.

A few minutes later, another rap came on the door. "Good-by, my dear neighbor. Good-by forever! They're dragging me off to Moscow. I've been chosen to be the sacrificial lamb for their October feast. Good-by, give everyone my greetings!"

"Good-by, David! Remember, the Lord is merciful. Take courage!" I replied through the door, recognizing the voice of a young Georgian who had also been kept here under the strictest discipline.

"Hey, there, get moving," barked the guard.

A short while later, I heard from the far end of the corridor the shouting of another man, "Farewell, friends. Think no evil of me. Down with the despots!"

The rest of the night I spent weeping and praying.

During the morning walk, I learned through the grapevine that in addition to Volkov and the Georgian, six other men had been shipped off to Moscow the night before. They were my four venerable Monarchists, the Social Revolutionary Myagkov, and the Communist historian, Nikolaenko.

The isolator was tense, shocked by the news. Word spread through the cells, "It's the October purge!"

The saddened expressions on the faces of the prisoners bespoke the wretched, sleepless night they had spent and the animal fear which had taken hold of them.

Winter came early. Time was passing with a painful slowness

Shortly before the New Year, Gaiderova was returned from Moscow and placed in the same cell with Bogutskaya. When I saw her during our walk, I barely recognized her. She had aged, became stoop-shouldered, moved about lamely.

"Zinaida Nikandrovna, what has happened to you?" I exclaimed. "You don't look like yourself!"

We embraced. She broke into tears.

"It's been dreadful, Lizochka. I can't tell you the tortures I went through. They hit me over the head until I became completely deaf. They deprived me of food for days at a time, gave me injections, subjected me to hypnosis, burned me with lighted cigarettes. . . ."

The poor woman. I recalled with what joyous anticipation she had left for Moscow for the review of her case. It seemed certain to both of us that she would be released. What happened? I asked her, and repeated the question when she failed to understand.

"I had such great hopes," she said. "But they proved completely unfounded. The Kremlin bosses have no intention of freeing the Zinovievites. They want us to confess at an open trial that we plotted to assassinate Kirov and to overthrow Stalin and his government with the aid of foreign interventionists." The intention was to provide Stalin with an excuse to imprison all the Zinovievites.

"At my age," she said, "I was unwilling to play the ignominious role they assigned to me. Despite the tortures, I refused to betray my followers. Consequently, they decided to send me back to this isolator, to languish here for the rest of my days."

I inquired about Zinoviev and Bakayev, who had also been summoned to Moscow. Gaiderova said that both had broken down after prolonged torture.

"We women held out much better," she declared with feminine pride, and mentioned another woman there, a young Trotskyist from the Vyborg District Committee of the Komsomol, who had also refused to sign a false confession. "As a result, there will be no women in the defendants' dock at the show trial. All the roles will be played by men."

"Lord have mercy on us!" I said. "Things have certainly taken a bad turn. I kept hoping that I might be released right after you. . . . But apparently there is no hope."

"What did you say? Ycs, I doubt it, dear Lizochka," Gaiderova replied in a barely audible voice.

A long procession of days went by, days without hope, without promise.

Then one morning in March, 1936, I was summoned to the office of the chief warden.

"I have news for you," he said. "Your stay has ended."

"How's that?" I stammered excitedly. "How's that?"

"That's how it is," he said. "You're going on a trip. You are being transferred to another isolator. So it goes. You've lived here, now you'll live in another place. But before you go, I want you to remember one thing: You have a bad habit of weeping very loudly. You bawl so the entire isolator can hear you. That's very bad. My advice to you is—don't cry so loud. It disturbs the prisoners and incites them to do all sorts of foolish things. So remember, wherever you are, don't bawl so loud. It might lead to serious consequences both for yourself and your fellow prisoners."

"Excuse me, Warden," I interrupted him, "won't you please tell me where I'm being sent?"

"I don't know . . . rather I do know, but I can't tell you," he replied in a friendly manner. He then informed me that

all my personal belongings would be returned to me and that I was to turn in all the things that had been issued to me here in the isolator. "You are to have your dinner and then set out on your journey."

After dinner I was taken, with my belongings, back to the warden's office. There I found, in addition to the chief warden, seven sturdy young men in military uniforms. They had no rifles, but carried revolvers at their belts.

"Prisoner," the chief warden addressed me stiffly, "what is your surname, first name, and patronymic?"

After he had filled out the necessary papers, he pointed to the uniformed men and said to me, "These guards will escort you to your new place of detention." Then he proceeded to give me instructions on how I was to conduct myself during the journey. I would travel in a passenger train, in a "soft car"—that is, second class. I was to give the impression that I was an army officer's wife. Under no circumstances was I to reveal to anyone that I was a prisoner. "If the passengers in the car speak to you," he warned me, "you are to remain quiet. Do not answer them, make believe you can't hear. . . ."

"But I'm not deaf," I protested.

"I know. Well, then, try to give the impression that you are a very proud person who disdains conversation with strangers."

The guards smiled.

"Should you need to go," he lowered his voice, "somewhere . . . make your request quietly to the guards so no one can hear you. They'll lead you there. You are to take your meals with the guards. They will bring the food to the compartment. You are to mind the guards and obey their orders."

He turned to the guards, "Are you men ready? Fine. Here is the prisoner's file. Sign for it, and you may go."

He was calm and business-like. There was nothing ominous in his tone or manner. But why seven guards? . . . Oh, well, what difference did it make? At least I would be in the fresh air, among free people. I would be traveling. Perhaps I'd meet someone I knew. "Dear Lord," I prayed, "if only Misha knew!"

"Well, let's go," said one of the guards. Two others picked up my baggage (a suitcase and a bag) and out we went through the isolator gate.

My legs were unsteady. I felt a tremor down my back. My head was spinning. The light was cutting into my eyes. Everything I beheld seemed grotesque, and I suddenly became self-conscious about my wrinkled coat and hat, about the runs in my stockings. But how nice, how invigorating the fresh air felt!

We climbed into the Black Maria. Soon we arrived at the railroad station and by the back way, through the service passage, we approached the train. There were no passengers yet. My escorts took over two compartments. Then toward evening the train started rolling. We were moving eastward.

"Where are we going?" I asked one of the guards.

"Not very far. We shall get there in a couple of days," was his laconic reply. Then he added, "Should you want anything, let us know."

The conversation ended there and then. I went to sleep. The guards took turns staying awake through the night. There was a change of shift every two to three hours. They were not a bad lot. Not once throughout the trip did they manifest any coarseness or display any unkindness toward me. I spent most of the time looking out of the window marveling at the unfolding landscape—the woods and hills and the undulating Siberian plains covered with snow.



## Chapter XIII

THE TRIP TOOK THREE FULL DAYS. IT WAS VERY disappointing. I ran into no one I knew. As for the passengers, I had no opportunity to talk with any of them. They showed little interest in me. They appeared to be preoccupied with troubles of their own. I wanted to scream out, to shout to them who I was, to tell them why I was being deprived of my liberty. . . . I wanted to tell them what I had experienced of the deception, the brutality, the cruelty. I wanted to break away from the guards, to escape to freedom—but I did not have the strength and I knew that no one would help me.

We got off the train at Krasnoyarsk.

The senior guard told his men to take me into the station dining room and wait for him there while he went to telephone for a car. A few minutes later, the Black Maria arrived. I climbed in and was driven to the Krasnoyarsk Political Isolator.

At the *kommandatura* my baggage was examined. I was permitted to keep some of my warm clothes. The rest of my belongings were sealed and put in the storeroom for safekeeping. From the *kommandatura* I was taken to the bathhouse. There I was issued a prison robe and undergarments. The corps inspector explained that I was permitted to wear my street clothes when I went out for exercise.

Generally, conditions in this isolator did not differ much from those at Chelyabinsk—the same food, the same regulations, the same dull monotony. But the quarters were inferior, considerably filthier. I was placed at first in a solitary cell on the fourth floor. A few days later, I was moved to the third floor into a cell that had more light.

The Krasnoyarsk Isolator is an old prison, built in pre-revolutionary days, consisting of some two hundred solitary cells. A four-story structure, it resembles an old-time Russian hostel. The stories are connected by broken-down, wooden stairways. The floor in the corridors is covered with a kind of military-blanket material. The cells have cement floors and unusually thick walls. The heavy wooden doors have large, clanking locks which require keys a foot long.

The furnishings in my cell consisted of an iron bed, a high stool, a small wooden table, a coat rack—and nothing else. There was a peephole in the door and another small opening in the barred window—a *fortochka*—for ventilation.

As before, walks provided the only diversion. On the first one, to my great surprise, I ran into Katya and Lukyanchikov. They had been brought to this isolator about two months earlier. Katya was in the sixth month of her pregnancy and expected to be set free in May.

"Of course, it won't be real freedom," Katya said. "They'll send me into exile, to starve somewhere. But at least it will be better than being stuck in these cages breathing this foul air. Let them send me into exile. I'll show them. They won't have me there long. I'll find a way out!"

I marveled at Katya. Women like her always manage. They are never at a loss in any situation. I told her as much.

Katya protested that she really wasn't very smart. In fact,

she had made an awful mistake getting herself "entangled with that fathead, Lukyanehikov."

"Am I being punished!" she exclaimed. "What a willy-nilly he turned out to be. And jealous? I can't begin to tell you. It so happened that I spotted one of the officials here, a man of influence in this isolator. (You know how I attract these stallions.) Well, I looked at him and noticed how he was melting before my eyes. So, I thought to myself, here's someone who could be useful to me. And what do you suppose? Lukyanehikov created such a scene, I shall never forget it! He accused me of 'profaning our beautiful relationship.' Phooey, what a fool! Because of him I had to give up the flirtation with the official."

Katya's stories bored me. But I knew no one else there, and had to put up with her company.

During our conversation, my attention was attracted by three elderly men standing nearby. They did not look like the rest of the prisoners. Dignified, neatly dressed, cleanly shaven, they made a fine impression. In answer to a question from me Katya identified them as the Zionists Milman and Davidovich, and the anarchist Antzilovsky.

"They don't seem to belong to our world," I remarked. "Are they newcomers?"

"Indeed not," she said. "They are veterans of political isolators. They have been in them for years." Arrested back in the days of Lenin, according to Katya, they had long ago served out the sentences imposed on them and were now being held indefinitely over and above their original term of imprisonment.

"But they seem to be in such good spirits. Apparently they haven't lost hope," I said.

"That's true. And notice what good friends they are, even

though they belong to different parties. Truly cultured, that's what they are. Still, I don't admire them, they seem to lack something. If I were as educated as they are, you wouldn't find me wasting away my life in an isolator. What the hell is the use of it?"

Davidovich, with a serious expression on his face, was telling an anecdote to his companions and a group gathered around them to listen.

". . . And so it happened that one day on Deribassov Street in Odessa the old man Cymbala was stopped by a Jew who had just arrived from Moscow.

"Tell me," said the visitor in a confidential tone, 'where can I find a gunsmith who can make me a rifle with a bent muzzle? I am willing to pay him well for it.'

"What do you want a bent rifle for?' asked Cymbala.

"In order to shoot Stalin from around the corner,' replied the visitor.

"In that case I must refer you to the wholesale firm of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Company,' said Cymbala. 'They make the best bent rifles.'"

Katya and I joined in the laughter.

Soon the exercise period was over. Later that day, these men were transferred to another floor and thereafter took their walks with a different shift. I was never to meet them again. I could only watch them at a distance through the window of my cell. But they stayed in my mind for their independent attitude, their sense of humor unimpaired by the many years they had spent in prison. It was evidence of moral strength, of an abiding faith in the ideals they cherished. I contrasted it with my own weepy and weak-willed behavior in the isolator and chided myself.

During subsequent walks I made the acquaintance of a

woman who also had great moral courage—the anarchist, Glafirova. She had been in political isolators for eleven years, three years in excess of her original sentence. Glafirova occupied the cell next to mine.

A tall, willowy blonde, with handsome gray eyes lighting a white face, she was a dynamic person and an unyielding idealist: a daughter of the nobility and an intellectual. In a modest black dress she was strikingly beautiful. I was told that she had gone through two hunger strikes to protest her imprisonment.

After our first meeting, several days went by without my seeing her again. Now and then I heard a commotion in her cell, but what was happening I did not know and there was no one whom I could ask. Then, a fortnight later, she appeared in the courtyard during the exercise period accompanied by a medic. She looked like a skeleton, all bones. But her eyes still sparkled in her wan face. I learned that she had just undergone a third hunger strike.

“Did you win your demands?” I asked her.

She replied that she didn’t. The administration had broken her hunger strike by force. Ignoring the medic who was standing near, she gave me details.

On the sixth day a band of eight guards had burst into her cell and bound her hands and feet. Forcing open her mouth, they poured in a glassful of liquid by means of a rubber tube. A couple of hours later, they returned. But this time she gritted her teeth and would not let them insert the rubber tube. Thereupon, they injected the liquid by means of an enema into the anal canal. That ended her hunger strike, the warden informed her, and she was compelled to sign a statement that she had called it off.

“Today I decided to come out for some fresh air.”

We chatted a while. She seemed very weak, and leaned against the prison wall for support.

"By the way," she said, "have you heard any news of what's going on in the country?"

"No," I replied. "I haven't. Why?"

The warden, she said, when urging her to end her hunger strike, had remarked that the country was going through a very critical period and that no one was being released from prison. "You can't possibly gain anything by striking," he had warned her. "If you persist, it may lead to your being included in the May Day purge list."

She wondered what made him say that there was a crisis in the country. Was the Soviet regime really being threatened?

*I expressed my doubts that the regime was toppling.*

"Well, perhaps it is wiser for me to wait awhile," she observed. "I'll wait till fall. Maybe there will be some changes for the better. If not, I shall go on a final hunger strike—either freedom or death. I do not choose to rot here."

I never saw this martyred soul again.

Life in a political isolator was in a sense like travel through a strange, weird sort of never-never land. One encountered people one never saw before and who were soon to vanish, never to be seen again. But the stories of their suffering lingered on in memory.

Among the prisoners in this isolator who attracted my attention was a young woman who kept very much to herself. She was, I learned, a student from Moscow, the daughter of a former Czarist political prisoner, a man named Vassiliev, who was executed a few days after Kirov's assassination.

Vassilieva—I never did learn her Christian name—told me that her father was an economist by profession. He had at one

time belonged to the Social Revolutionary party. But that was before the revolution. In recent years, he had been an active member of the Society of Former Political Prisoners. In December, 1934, he was arrested because of his alleged connection with the "criminal group headed by Larin." This group was accused of conspiring to overthrow the Soviet government by terrorist means.

The Vassilievs, who by Soviet standards were well off, had a summer home near Moscow, "a beautiful place, quiet, shaded by trees, not far from a lake." Here many interesting people visited—artists, writers, scientists, political leaders. One of the visitors in the summer of 1934 was Larin, representative of the Central Control Commission of the party in the Northern Caucasus, whom her father had known since the days when both had served time in Czarist prisons. The two men spent a good deal of time reminiscing and discussing current political affairs. Larin strongly favored the liberalization of the Soviet regime. He had the highest praise for Kirov as a man of vision, and as a progressive revolutionist. It was all innocent, harmless talk.

"But a few months later, in November," Vassilieva told me, "Papa and Larin were arrested. Larin was never heard of again. As for my father, I read of his fate in the papers. He was among the first so-called White Guardists to be sentenced to death by the Military Collegium, under the special decree of December 1, 1934."

Later that same month, during the night, their apartment was raided by the NKVD and she and her mother were placed under arrest as "members of a traitor's family." They were held for twenty-four hours at Lubianka, headquarters of the secret police in Moscow, and while there they were given a document to sign. "Because of the tears in my eyes, I couldn't

read what it said. But I signed it. They shipped Mother off to the Suzdal Political Isolator and me to Yaroslavl, where I spent a year before being transferred to this isolator. I have been here seven months. Last year, I received a letter from Mama. She was in the Tambovsk Isolator. That was the last I heard from her. Where she is now I have no idea."

The young, attractive Vassilieva was old beyond her years. She was withdrawn, frightened, devoid of all hope.

"My loved ones are gone. My life is crushed. What is there left for me to live for?"



## *Chapter* XIV

SUMMER, 1936.

Out of the free world a sparrow flew into my cell through the small opening in the window. Hard as it tried, it could not get out again. It flew nervously about, beating its wings against the walls and the barred window.

The guards kicked up a fuss. They accused me of attracting the bird by putting bread crumbs on the window sill. According to them, I was planning by means of the bird "to establish illegal contact with the outside world." My punishment was four days in the punitive cell.

The punitive cell, located in the basement, differed only slightly from the regular cells—a little darker, a little colder. The food rations were smaller. That I was deprived of exercise was the important difference.

Returning to my own cell after the four-day absence, I found that I now had a cellmate, a Madame Drobnis. The addition of a second cot meant that there was now practically no free floor space left in the cell. Nonetheless, I was happy to share it with another living being.

Madame Drobnis was an elegant young woman with a pleasant, intelligent face. She apparently had mingled in the highest Soviet circles until quite recently. In introducing herself, she told me that she was a journalist, that her parents

were old revolutionaries and her husband was a leading Trotskyist. She herself had also been active in the Trotskyist movement.

Madame Drobnis had been brought here the day before from the NKVD Internal Prison in Moscow. At first she was placed in a solitary cell in the Communist sector, but the Loyalists raised such loud objections that she had to be taken out of there. Since there were no vacant cells available, she was moved into mine.

She apologized for imposing on me. "I realize that I am crowding you," she said. I tried to assure her that it did not matter, but she seemed to have difficulty in hearing me.

When it came time for exercise, we went out together. On the way to the courtyard, we encountered an elderly couple, the Gusevs, and I noticed that they and my cellmate seemed strangely startled. In the courtyard, first the old woman and then her husband threw their arms around Madame Drobnis. They hugged her and showered her with kisses. The guard tried to break up the reunion—but, failing, walked off in disgust, mumbling something about "the lack of discipline among these damned prisoners."

I stepped aside and observed the scene from a little distance as the two women and the man wept and embraced and talked, paying no attention to the people around them. It became apparent after a few minutes that the young woman was almost completely deaf. In a voice of horror the older woman said, "My dear child, what happened to you? How did you lose your hearing? My darling, my precious baby. . . ."

"They did that to me at the Lubianka, Mama, during the interrogation. . . ."

After we returned to our cell, Madame Drobnis confirmed what I had guessed, that the Gusevs were her parents. They

had not seen one another in a long time, she explained, because as loyal Stalinists the old people had "dissociated" themselves from her. I asked her what she meant by that.

"Well, to put it bluntly," she said, "they disowned me because of my Trotskyist views. They made a public announcement to that effect. It was the price they paid to prove their fealty to the Stalinist clique." However, it did them little good. In the end, they got into trouble anyway. Because they had spoken out against the mass arrests of Old Leninists, they themselves were arrested and packed off to a political isolator.

"My first impulse when I saw them today," Madame Drobnis said, "was to snub them for their cruelty and cowardly action against me, their only child. But then I began to feel sorry for them. It isn't right to harbor ill feelings toward one's parents. They have suffered enough for what they have done and they are eaten up with shame and remorse."

Madame Drobnis proved to be a somewhat disturbing roommate. She caused me considerable loss of sleep. Before the week was over a special emissary of the Central Committee of the party arrived from Moscow to take testimony from her in connection with the case that was being prepared against the Soviet Marshal Bluecher. What the nature of the case was she did not disclose to me, and I did not ask her. But the interrogation went on for a full month. She would be summoned to the warden's office every evening and would not return till morning.

Only once did she volunteer any information. "They want me to testify against Bluecher," she explained. "But I've turned the tables on them and am supplying them with incriminating evidence against police chief Yagoda. As far

as we Trotskyists are concerned, Bluccher has done less harm to us than that unscrupulous careerist, Yagoda. On his conscience is the blood of untold numbers of Trotskyists whom he has had tortured to death in his dungeons."

In September, Madame Drobnis was called out to Moscow for further questioning. Once more I was alone in my cell. And now my nerves began to act up again. I wept incessantly. Once, unable to control myself, I broke into a loud lament. The guard—a simple, kindly moujik—stood it as long as he could. Then he opened the little trap window in the door of my cell and reproached me.

"What are you howling for?" he demanded in fatherly fashion. "Why are you letting yourself go like that? I'm asking you, why act crazy like that?"

"I'm tired," I said to him, "sick and tired of all this. When will it end?"

"What have you got to complain about, I'm asking you?"

"I hate everything here. I'm sick of it. Nothing to read, nothing to do. I'm alone, torn away from my family and my friends. I want to be free. I want to live in the free world again. . . ."

"Oh, so-o-o that's it. You want to be free? You're certainly a queer one. You ought to live in the free world these days and it would serve you right. You think it's a picnic to be free. A lot you know."

He snapped shut the window. A moment later, he opened it again. "You think it's bad here? You get your food, you get your lodging, everything is served to you, no fuss, no bother. In the free world, you'd have to work for it. And in addition, all sorts of party demands: volunteer for this, volunteer for that. . . . A lot you understand about freedom. Don't

think it's so sweet and rosy! If you had sense, you'd know how much better off you are, and stop complaining."

These simple words had a sobering effect on me. They shook me out of my neurotic state and brought me back to reality.

## *Chapter X V*

IN THE LATTER PART OF SEPTEMBER, 1936, NEW restrictions were imposed. By order from Moscow, the various classifications for inmates of the isolator were abolished. We were no longer to be grouped as "arrested," "accused," and "temporarily deprived of civil rights." Henceforth, all of us were to be lumped into a single category—"prisoners." The same order deprived us of the right to make purchases at the isolator commissary. We were no longer permitted to buy, out of our own funds, such commodities as sugar, herring, soap, stockings, thread, or additional rations of bread. Moreover, we were denied the right to post letters or to file complaints in writing. The supply of newspapers to the Communist sector was also discontinued.

The prisoners were infuriated by this arbitrary abrogation of their privileges. All day and all night they shouted their protests. They banged against the doors with chairs and tables, smashed the glass in the windows. In the morning, one of the Social Revolutionary prisoners was found dead, hanging from a self-made noose; three of the Communist prisoners were taken to the insane asylum.

Unperturbed, the administration of the isolator continued to implement the new rules. On the following day, the walks were curtailed. Instead of two half-hour walks a day, we were

now allowed one a day, and for a period of only fifteen minutes. What's more, we were no longer let out in groups, floor by floor, but individually.

The new "rules and regulations" were posted on the cell walls. They cited a long list of offenses for which prisoners would be confined to punitive cells. Finally, there was the severest deprivation of all—wooden shutters were set up outside the windows, cutting off all natural light. The cells were now not only bare but also dark.

When I saw my darkened cell for the first time, after returning from a walk, I protested and said that I would not go in there. The inspector tried to calm me. "It's not our doing," he explained. "These are orders from above."

I told him I didn't care whose orders they were, I wasn't going to stay in a darkened cell. "Put me in a cell with light in it," I demanded.

He maintained that all the cells had been darkened, that these were new orders. I accused him of lying, and asked to see the warden. Told that he was in Moscow, I screamed that he should take me to the assistant warden.

"Wait a while, he'll be here soon," the inspector said.

Presently, the assistant warden arrived at the door of my cell. His expression was sad. "What did you want to see the warden about?" he asked.

I told him rather petulantly that I resented the shutters on my window, that I did not see why I was being punished. He, too, tried to calm me, saying that he would discuss the matter with me in private in his office.

About ten minutes later I was taken to him. Contrary to custom, I was admitted to his office alone, unaccompanied by the inspector, who remained in the corridor. The assistant warden pointed to a chair, and again contrary to regulations

asked me to sit down. (Ordinarily, prisoners were obliged to stand while conversing with their "superiors.")

"You wished to speak to me about the new prison regulations?" he inquired with an unsmiling face.

I noted that he used the word "prison." This, too, was a departure from usual practice. Officials carefully avoided the use of that term. I was once severely reprimanded for it by the warden at Chelyabinsk. "This is no prison," he corrected me, "but a political isolator, and you ought to know the difference." But now, apparently, a distinction was no longer drawn between the two types of penal institution. I mentioned this to the assistant warden.

"Yes," he agreed, "great changes have taken place." And he went on to review facts I already knew.

"But why are these measures being applied to me?" I demanded. "I am not a party member. Your party affairs do not interest me. I've never meddled in them."

Patiently he explained that within the isolator all distinctions had been abolished, that Communists and non-Communists, men and women would from now on be on an equal footing. Moreover, prisoners would be confined to punitive cells for the slightest infraction of the rules, such as loud conversation or tapping out messages.

"But these are impossible conditions," I protested. "How can one put up with them?"

"I don't know. We don't know what will happen to you—or to us, for that matter." After a moment in which I thought he was fighting for composure, he added, "That's how things are. You'll have to get accustomed to the new regimen. In a way, you're fortunate. You were not included in the latest purge. Your codefendant was not so lucky. She and her hus-



band were taken away yesterday." The last he said in a low tone.

"Not Lukyanchikova?" I asked in amazement.

"Katya Rogacheva," he corrected me. Then he rose from his chair, indicating that my audience with him was over.

The next morning, the door to my cell was opened quietly to admit the corps inspector. Silently, he showed me his watch. The hands pointed to two minutes past seven. Silently, he indicated that I must rise. Silently, he folded the bed, with mattress and pillow, against the wall, and locked it. And silently, he departed. All this, without uttering a word, rather like a trained dog. It seemed like an apparition.

Perhaps twenty minutes later I was taken to the lavatory. When I returned, my cell had been swept and aired. The small opening in the window was not only closed but locked, the electric lights were out, and the place was plunged in darkness. Breakfast (consisting of tea and bread) was handed to me through the *fortochka* in the door, then immediately the opening was slammed shut.

The new regulations were now in full force.

Formerly, a sparrow would occasionally alight on the window sill of my cell and its chirping would serve as a bridge linking me with the free and living world. But that was gone now. The days like the cell were dark and bare and silent. I walked alone when I took my exercise, saw no other prisoners, exchanged words with no one, returned to my cell when the inspector pointed in silence to the door, indicating that time was up.

Where had everyone gone? What had happened to them? It was a house of the dead.

This went on for several days. Then during a tour of inspection my cell was visited by the chief warden who had returned

from Moscow. With him was a new assistant warden. (The former assistant had disappeared.) Standing behind them in the corridor was another strange man who, I subsequently learned, was the new corps inspector.

"Well, how are things going here?" inquired the warden, without looking at me. "A little dark, eh? . . . Yes, true enough, it's somewhat dark. But that doesn't matter. After all, you're not expected to do any embroidery work here. The reason we've put the shutters on the windows is to keep you warm. We have to economize on fuel, you know. We've also had to cut down the exercise period, though you can exercise inside the cell all you want. In short, the honeymoon is over. The time has come for all of you to pay for the crimes you have committed against the working class. Have you read the new rules and regulations carefully?"

"I've read them several times," I replied, "since there is nothing else for me to read."

"You're not supposed to read anything else. Just know the regulations. That's all we expect of you."

This heralded a complete change of administration. Within a short time there were new men in all the posts. Not one of the former officials was retained. I learned this from the matron who accompanied me to the bathhouse. She and I had been "friends" prior to the introduction of the new regulations. Our friendship had been cemented too by my gifts to her of unused rations of bread, cakes of soap, et cetera.

"Practically everyone has been replaced," she reported to me. "They have all been sent back for reindoctrination. From the old crowd, only I have remained and about twenty guards. The former assistant warden has been liquidated. He turned out to be an enemy of the people. . . . By the way, do you

have any soap on you? Give it to me quickly. You can get new soap from the bath attendant."

"But the bath attendant knows that I've been issued soap till the end of the month," I protested.

"He doesn't know a damned thing," she insisted. "He's a new one here, and a complete fool. How would he know whether you'd gotten your soap or not? Here is what you do: after you receive the soap from the bath attendant, you later ask the corps inspector for soap, and when the chief warden inspects your cell, also ask him for some soap. He'll give it to you. The soap will come in handy, and whatever extra pieces you have you can give to me."

I did as she suggested. As a result, I received nearly a half-pound of soap from the bath attendant, and almost as much from the corps inspector. The following morning, when I went to the lavatory, I slipped a cake of soap to the matron. She hurriedly hid it inside her blouse.

The change of administration was accompanied by marked changes within the isolator itself. Prisoners were transferred from cell to cell. Some of them were compelled to double up. The rule of solitary confinement was no longer upheld. As for me, I was moved to the third floor, into a cell with two beds. On my way there I beheld an unusual sight. The corridor was filled with guards armed with rifles, one at every cell door. In between were inspectors who, from time to time, pressed their ears against the cell doors, or peered through the keyholes. The new regulations!

An hour after I had settled in the new place, another woman prisoner was moved into my cell. She looked me over suspiciously. There was nothing for us to do but pace up and down, tripping over one another. At dinner time we became acquainted.

Urovskaya was a Trotskyist and former propaganda worker in the Far Eastern Regional Committee of the party. During the "militant communism" era she served in the Revolutionary Military Council and was a close collaborator of Trotsky. Then she fell into disfavor and was under a cloud for a long time. Her husband, also an active Trotskyist, had died in exile, in the Turukhan Region.

While we were talking she suddenly became apprehensive. "Did you hear them?" she whispered. "They have sneaked up to our door. They are trying to listen in . . . A,B,C,D,E,F,G. . . . One must not lose one's ability to speak . . . H,I,J,K, L,M,N . . . Speaking is my profession. . . . Haven't you really heard of my family? You are indeed uninformed about the political life of your country. We are well known to the party; in fact, to the entire nation."

She proceeded to recite the alphabet for a few minutes. Then she turned to me again. "Who was in charge of the guards when Czar Nicholas II was held prisoner in Sverdlovsk? . . . You don't know? What kind of a White Guardist are you if you don't know who shot the last Emperor of All the Russias? For your information, the man who personally shot the Czar was none other than my own brother, Yakov Urovsky. . . . One, two, three, four, five, six, seven . . . They are listening in again . . . eight, nine, ten, eleven. . . So as not to lose one's ability to speak, one must count to a hundred, a hundred times a day."

Later in the evening as I was about to fall asleep, I heard a light tapping on the wall nearest me. There was a definite rhythm to it like the tapping of a telegraph instrument. Urovskaya listened intently. When the tapping ceased, she looked around cautiously, then whispered to me, "Please pass on the message: 'Simonovsky and Olshevsky are both here.

They are well and in good spirits.' One, two, three, four, five, six . . . One must not lose one's power of speech."

"I'm sorry," I replied, "but I don't know how to transmit the message."

"You mean to say that you don't know the prison telegraph code? Ye gods of Mount Olympus! Very well, I shall teach it to you. Try to memorize it."

Slowly she explained the code to me. The prison alphabet consists of twenty-five letters. The letter "X" is omitted. It is substituted by "KS." The alphabet is arranged in five rows, with five letters in each row:

a	b	c	d	e
f	g	h	i	j
k	l	m	n	o
p	q	r	s	t
u	v	w	y	z

As example, she explained the code for the word "here." Take the first letter. "H" is in the second horizontal row, third place vertically, reading from left to right. Its co-ordinates are, therefore, 2-3. You tap one, two, a short pause; then one, two, three, and a somewhat longer pause. The next letter is "E." "E" is in the first horizontal row, fifth place vertically. Its co-ordinates are, therefore, 1-5. You tap: one, pause; one, two, three, four, five, pause. And so on.

"Do you follow me? The important thing is to memorize the table. I'll get a piece of paper tomorrow and write it down for you. To be able to communicate with one's fellow prisoners is more important than you realize."

By concentrating, I visualized the table as she described it and managed to impress it on my mind. I have always had an exceptionally good memory. This is fortunate, for Urovskaya

was moved out of my cell the following morning, before she had an opportunity to procure a piece of paper to write down the tale. Her place in the cell was taken by another woman prisoner.

My new cellmate was an attractive young woman in her middle thirties—tall, well-formed, and graceful, with pretty gray eyes. She carried herself with dignity and had an air of self-confidence.

Rita Vassilyeva, as she was called, was a heroine of the October Revolution. She had commanded the Women's Battalion during the civil war and was awarded several military decorations. Her immediate superior was War Commissar Leon Trotsky. After the civil war, she and her husband were assigned to the Vyborg District Committee of the party, where their work brought them into contact with the Young Leninist Club.

At that time, a documentary film was being produced by the Historical Division of the party to depict the heroism displayed by the young women of the Vyborg District during the October Revolution. All the parts were played by the actual participants in the events described. Rita was cast in her true-to-life role as commander of the Women's Battalion.

But in 1928, Rita and her husband became involved in the factional strife within the party. The young couple were ardent Zinovievites. This led to their expulsion from the party and exile to the Turukhan Region. Six years later, in 1934, Rita was summoned back to Leningrad for a retake of some of the sequences in the film. The documentary now had a different cast and an altered scenario to conform with "corrections made in the history of the October Revolution."

Taking advantage of her presence in Leningrad, Rita made

a personal appeal to Kirov to reinstate her and her husband in the party. Kirov reacted favorably, and after studying their case he ordered the party organization to reissue membership cards to Rita and her husband.

"In the meantime," she told me, "the refilming of the documentary was postponed, at Kirov's request. But that did not matter to me. Overjoyed by our reinstatement in the party, I set out for home. I was planning to stay just a short while there to wind up our family affairs and then return with my husband to Leningrad."

While she was on the train she heard the news of Kirov's assassination. No sooner did she get home than both she and her husband were placed under arrest and rushed by plane to Leningrad to be questioned. She told me how for a period of more than a month, every day, for twelve to fifteen hours on end she was tormented by the NKVD. They demanded that she plead guilty to two charges: first, that she had prevailed on Kirov to postpone indefinitely the refilming of the documentary; and, second, that she at Zinoviev's behest had urged Nikolayev to kill Kirov.

Despite the tortures inflicted on them, neither Rita nor her husband signed the confession demanded. About the middle of January, 1935, the two were packed off to the Upper-Uralsk Isolator.

About a year later, Rita was brought to Moscow, ostensibly for a review of her case. This time the NKVD employed a different approach. They told her that the higher interests of the party and the world revolution demanded that she testify at an open trial that she had belonged to a secret organization of Zinovievites and Trotskyists which plotted to assassinate Stalin and Kirov.

"Are you out of your minds?" she said to them. "I was a

commander of a Red Guard battalion. My military exploits are well known. And you want to picture me as a counter-revolutionary. I dare you to permit me to appear in open court. I'd let the entire world know that you, yourselves, murdered Kirov and put the blame on innocent people."

For five months longer they tortured her, but still she refused to yield. "Incidentally," she pointed out, "those who did give in—Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bakayev, and so forth—have all been liquidated. While I, as you see, am still alive!"

Rita Vassilyeva did not stay long in my cell. She was transferred the following day. I was sorry to part with her for I liked her and felt that we had a good deal in common despite the differences in our origin and upbringing.

Sweeping changes were taking place in the NKVD as Yagoda was replaced by Yezhov, and these changes, in turn, had their repercussions in our little world inside the political isolator. Day by day, prison conditions were becoming more and more severe. One of the most humiliating innovations was the bodily search of prisoners, which was now conducted periodically at the bathhouse.

The guards, too, had undergone a transformation—on the surface, at any rate. They had all been given short-term courses in the new regulations and had been reshuffled among the different isolators. They seemed sterner than before and appeared to take their work more seriously. Also they gave the impression of being better fed and better treated and more satisfied with their jobs. Some of them had even gone in for wearing perfume—which in Soviet bureaucratic circles was a mark of social distinction. But essentially, I suspect, they were the same men who had only recently accepted gifts from prisoners in return for small favors. And I do not doubt that



many of them chafed under the new regulations no less than the prisoners.

I quickly mastered the code for tapping out messages and used it with considerable success. By this means I learned that there was a typhus epidemic raging in the isolator. On the first floor, nearly all the Monarchists had perished. In the cell next to mine, two Trotskyists were stricken with the disease.

The latrine on our floor was horridly filthy and malodorous. Its stench was insufferable. But there was a compensating factor—there was no shutter on the latrine window. A hang-over from the “liberal” regime. What’s more, when women used the latrine, its outside door was kept shut. This offered a perfect opportunity to establish contact between floors.

During my last day at this isolator, a “sensational event” occurred: Three sheets of paper and a practically new pencil disappeared from the chief warden’s desk. Suspicion fell on the Trotskyists from the second floor. However, a most thorough search failed to locate the purloined objects.

In the middle of October, two of us were packed into a prison train and shipped off westward. My companion was an elderly Communist woman called Tartakovskaya.

A member of the old intelligentsia, Tartakovskaya had at one time played a leading part in the Zinoviev movement. She was one of the signers of the Declaration of 121 and a close personal friend of Kostina, Bakayev’s wife. The eighteen months she had spent in political isolators had aged her and had seriously impaired her health.

A nervous, panicky woman with a spasmodic facial tic, Tartakovskaya was an inveterate pessimist. Throughout the trip she tried to convince me that we were being taken to

Moscow to be purged on the eve of the November celebrations marking the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. I refused to believe it. However, one circumstance did perturb me—the timing of our summons to Moscow. It was usually toward the end of October that prisoners slated for the anniversary purge were shipped to the capital.

I tried in every way to dispel her alarm but Tartakovskaya clung to her premonition of our doom, supporting her grim theory with what she called “self-apparent facts.” My refusal to agree angered her. She considered me simple-minded and naïve. And my attempts to change the topic of conversation proved unavailing.

In Moscow, we spent the night in the Butyiki Prison. The next morning I was sent on to Leningrad. She remained in Butyrki.

## *Chapter* X V I

I WAS BACK IN THE LENINGRAD JAIL OF THE NKVD, where exactly two years before my prison career had begun. This time I was locked in Cell No. 19. That night, barely an hour after my arrival, I was summoned for interrogation. The investigator, a man called Katsaphia, received me most amiably.

"You have been in prison long—much too long," he said in a solicitous tone. "But I plan to wind up your case one-two-three. We'll do it together, seal everything up, and you will be free again. Where would you like to live? In which town? You won't be permitted to live in a large city, you realize. But what do you want a large city for? You'll be better off in the provinces."

He went on for a long time in this unctuous, sirupy manner. He hoped, he said, that I would not delay him unduly. He was expected at a conference at the ministry where he was scheduled to deliver a report. The minister himself was attending the conference. It would be very nice if he could tell the minister that Elizaveta Lermolo had sincerely repented.

I remained silent. He reached for his cigarette case and held it out to me. "May I offer you a cigarette?"

I thanked him and told him that I didn't smoke.

"That's too bad," he said. "Why? All prisoners smoke from

the first day of their imprisonment. Smoking comforts them and provides them with a pleasant distraction. May I be the first to introduce you to a cigarette? Please take one."

"Thank you. I'll do without smoking."

He paused for a moment, as if to gather his thoughts. "Believe me, my dear friend, I understand you completely. You are a woman of refinement, and I realize that you couldn't have been directly implicated in a murder. Isn't that so? As a matter of fact, your involvement in the Kirov assassination is very minor. I can see exactly how it happened. All sorts of party people would visit Pudozh, share with you the latest political news and party gossip. To you, living in the dull provinces—the very name Pudozh sounds dreary to me—all this talk must have seemed very exciting and interesting. You had been in exile for several years, removed from any form of social life. Consequently, all these spicy anecdotes about the doings of high party and government officials intrigued you. You must have heard fantastic tales about the death of Allilueva, or the death of Budenny's wife. Isn't that right?"

"No," I objected, "that is not true."

Immediately, a change came over him. His face became livid. "Don't play dumb with me!" he screamed. "It won't help you. Where did you hide Zinoviev's letter? . . . What? You received no letter from Zinoviev? Whose letter was it then? Bakayev's? Katalynov's? Where is your husband?"

"I have no husband."

"What happened to him?"

"I lost my husband in 1931."

"You are lying. We have proof that you have maintained contact with him. And how did you get in touch with the Latvian consul?"

"I never was in touch with any consul," I replied wearily.

"You don't know the Latvian consul? Then how is it that he knows you so well? You say that you never spread any rumors about Allilueva's death. But there is a woman right here in this prison who can prove that you did. Her name is Katya Rogacheva. . . . Aha! You see, you can't fool us. We know everything about you. You might as well give up. Tell the truth, sign the protocols, and you can go back to sleep. You have already admitted that you ensnared Nikolayev into your White Guard nest. Whom else did you ensnare?"

"I haven't admitted anything. I didn't ensnare anyone. Why don't you leave me alone?"

"I'm warning you, if you won't listen to reason, there are other methods I can use."

He raved on and on. But I could no longer hear what he was saying. I had an excruciating pain in my abdomen. My head was spinning. I felt as if I were going to faint.

The following day I was taken to the prison hospital, The Crosses, suffering from dysentery. Fortunately, I spent only a short time there—five to six days. The hospital differed in no respect from an ordinary prison, except that the Chekists wore white robes over their uniforms. There were shutters on the windows, armed guards, the same oppressive atmosphere that obtained in the isolators. Physicians could talk to patients only in the presence of a Chekist official.

In the ward with me were about a dozen women, of all ages, from all walks of life. They were a noisy, talkative group, particularly the convalescents. They seemed to know all the answers. They knew who had denounced whom and why, and who was "sure to be liquidated next."

The cot to the right of me was occupied by a Leningrad woman, the wife of a shop superintendent at the Red Putilov plant. Her husband, a Communist, had been arrested in De-

ember, 1934, and a month later she, too, was placed under arrest.

Asked if her husband had belonged to the Zinoviev faction, she replied, "Oh, no. He was never a Zinovievite. The only thing the NKVD had against him was that he had been appointed to his job by Kirov. As you know," she added, "Kirov's protégés are not liked very much these days." And she told me how, in the days following Kirov's assassination, four soldiers were set to guard her husband, to protect him allegedly from counterrevolutionaries; and how the same soldiers eventually convoyed him to prison. "In such manner all of Kirov's adherents were saved from the working class enemies."

Some time later, I engaged in conversation with my neighbor to the left. It developed that she, too, was a defendant in the Kirov case. I assumed that she was either a Zinovievite or a member of the Nikolayev family, but she assured me that neither was the case. She was not a party member, nor did she know any of the Nikolayevs.

"I was dragged into the case in the most farfetched manner," she volunteered. "Back in 1922, my sister worked as a librarian at the Young Leninist Club. This club was disbanded by Kirov some seven or eight years ago. Nevertheless, anyone who had ever been associated with it was presumed to be Nikolayev's accomplice. On these grounds they arrested my sister. At the time of her arrest, she lived with me. As she is unmarried, they arrested me as her closest relation, and with me they arrested my husband. Later on, they seized the secretary of the Communist cell where my sister worked, and all those people who had recommended her for the job. I can hardly count the number of people who were rounded up."

Another time, she told me, "You have no idea what went

on in Leningrad in 1935. Let us say that Citizen A is arrested. Then they seize his next of kin, then his other relatives, his friends and acquaintances, their relatives, the people who share his apartment, persons who are listed in his address book, and so on without end."

In Leningrad alone, she asserted, more than a half-million people were arrested. The city was decimated. Hardest hit were the Communists. "They were shot left and right. I can understand to some extent the arrest of Communists. They may have engaged in some political intrigue in the struggle for power. But why punish us, non-party people?"

These and similar stories that I heard reassured me of the wisdom of my action in divorcing my husband. The divorce made it possible for me to say with truth that I did not know where my husband was, that "I lost him in 1931." It is not difficult to guess what his fate would have been if I hadn't gone through the formalities of a divorce.

Next to us was the ward for the violently insane. The constant screaming that emanated from there terrified me. I was therefore delighted when I was told, "Get your things together. You are leaving with the next convoy."

It didn't take me long to get ready. In double time, I washed in the bathhouse, was subjected to a bodily search, had my few personal belongings examined, and was carted away in a Black Maria to the railroad station. There I was handed over to the convoy patrol and was assigned to the women's car of the prison train.

No sooner did the guard shut the car door after me when I heard, out of the semidarkness, loud, friendly exclamations.

"Elizaveta! Is that you? How good to see you."

"Holy Mother! Look whom the Lord has brought us!"

Straining my eyes, I was barely able to make out the faces of Katya Rogacheva and her mother, Maria Tikhonovna. Katya looked moderately well, but her mother was like a living corpse.

"Mother and I just met on the train," Katya said to me in a whisper. "I barely recognized her. She seems to have one foot in the grave. Poor thing."

Then she added in a normal voice, "The investigator Katsapha told me that you made a clear confession, signed the protocols, and were released from jail. What happened? Did he deceive you—make you sign the protocols and then refuse to release you?"

I told her that I hadn't signed the protocols, that for two years I had refused to sign anything.

"That's what I thought," she said. "I told Katsapha, why do you malign that woman? She, I said, is a decent person, even though she is not of our class. You won't break her easily."

The same Katsapha, I told her, tried to convince me that she, Katya, had denounced me and had told him that I had been spreading rumors about Allilueva's death.

"He was lying in his teeth, the son of a bitch," Katya said heatedly, "I never told him anything of the sort. He tried the same trick on me. He said to me that he could have you confirm in my very presence that I had been circulating lies about Allilueva's death. 'Whom are you fooling?' I said to him. 'I don't believe anything you say.'"

I inquired about Lukyanchikov and asked if he too were on the train.

"Haven't you heard?" she said. "Lukyanchikov was liquidated. The poor lamb. He was too gentle for this harsh world



of ours. The Lord has taken him unto His bosom. Well, I guess we'll all go there eventually."

"And where is your baby?"

"They took him away from me. They have put him in a nursery home. The only reason they didn't liquidate me is that I was pregnant again. For the second time with Lukyanchikov."

While we were talking, some of the guards gathered near our compartment and brazenly tried to listen in. The windows in our car were blacked out. The car was filled with prisoners. But neither Katya nor I was able to exchange a word with any of them. The guards would not permit it.

The train was moving northward. As our car was unheated, we sat wrapped in our winter coats. The sentries posted at every compartment were changed every two hours, and at each change the roll of prisoners was called. We were wakened and examined, as if to see whether we were still alive.

Despite the strict supervision, Katya managed somehow to pick up additional food for herself and her mother. She carried on shamelessly with the guards and even allowed them to take liberties with her. Nor did she seem to be the least embarrassed before her mother.

It was Katya who learned that we were destined for Solovetsk. My heart sank upon hearing this news, for I had heard so many horrible tales about that cursed island.

"Never mind," proclaimed Katya cheerily. "Solovetsk is not such a bad place after all. We shall live in a monastery and do penance for our sins. Hal People work there, they earn their daily bread. We've been loafing too long. It's time we went back to work. At least, we'll get to move about, breathe fresh air, see living human beings. We shan't perish. Let's not despair!"

## Chapter XVII

EARLY NOVEMBER. A LIGHT FROST WAS IN THE air. Fresh, cold breezes were blowing from the sea.

Our train guards—sleepy and disheveled—handed us over to the Solovetsk guards, who in sharp contrast were spruce-looking, nattily attired in long army coats, fur caps, felt boots, and fur-lined gloves. In their presence, our train guards tried to pull themselves together—straightened their caps, fastened their belts.

We were led aboard an NKVD ship. My cabin, resembling a prison cell, contained an iron berth bolted to the floor, a small table, and a stool. The porthole was covered with gray paint. Outside the door was a guard armed with a rifle. The cabin was warm. It was quiet. I crawled into my berth and was soon fast asleep.

When we docked, I was taken to a new, shiny police van. Inside were five women, among them my two traveling companions from Leningrad.

"Say," Katya remarked with breezy enthusiasm, "did you notice how orderly everything is here?"

We nodded.

It was bitter cold. We wrapped ourselves in all we had, leaving only our eyes uncovered. *Let's get there quickly*, I prayed as I hugged the side of the car to keep warm.

The registration of the new prisoners at the Solovetsk office took a long time. We were admitted singly. There was a business-like efficiency about the place—no one seemed rushed or harassed. The entire procedure was conducted smoothly, confidently, by officials who showed that they knew their business.

A woman-inspector in a Clickist uniform subjected me to a thorough body-search, from head to toe. Wearing rubber gloves, she examined every crevice in my body, also looked into my teeth, my hair, under my fingernails. In the meantime, men-inspectors were examining my personal belongings and carefully listing them. The chief warden was present during the proceedings, questioning me and checking my answers against the information contained in my dossier.

After being fingerprinted, I was led to the bathhouse. There my hair was cut and my belongings were taken from me to be disinfected. In exchange, I was issued prison garments—an undershirt, black stockings, a black sateen dress, coarse shoes with wooden soles, and a long flannel robe. In this attire I was taken to my cell.

The floor of the long, narrow corridor was covered with a rough, woolen material to drown out the sound of footsteps. Stationed at each door was a guard with a rifle. The guards stood at attention, their faces cold and immobile as if saying, "Don't linger. Keep moving!" They were outfitted in well-tailored long coats, shiny new peaked caps, patent-leather boots.

My cell was small—four by two by two and a half meters—dark, and damp as a cellar. It had a low, arched ceiling, reminiscent of the days when this was a monastery, and white-washed walls. The door was padlocked and there was the inevitable shutter on the window. The furnishings: a mattress

and pillow on the bed; a table and stool, both fastened to the cement floor; an electric light near the ceiling; a towel, a cake of soap, and a comb; and a cardboard nailed to the door listing the rules and regulations. That was all.

An hour or so after my arrival, the *fortochka* in the door suddenly opened and I was handed a loaf of bread, weighing about a pound, and a eup of unswcetened, artificial coffee. For dinner I was brought a liter of soup in which floated pieces of dried potato, a few grains of millet, and chunks of overcooked salty, slightly decomposed codfish. No bread.

After dinner I was taken for my exercise to a yard divided by wooden partitions into several narrow, roofless passageways which resembled a maze for testing guinea pigs. The temperature was minus 15 to 20 degrees Centigrade. All I had on was a flannel robe, heavy, leather shoes, and a towel over my head. I hopped around in the narrow passage, eagerly inhaling the fresh air, watched by the corps inspector who accompanied me and by the sentry on the tower who held a tommy-gun "on the ready."

The Solovetsk Political Isolator, so far as I could judge, was an elongated, one-and-a-half-story stone building of ancient construction but with a new roof. From the number of windows (I counted twenty to twenty-five), I estimated that it held not more than eighty to a hundred prisoners. My cell was on the upper floor. And since it was damp, one could assume that the cells on the half-basement floor were even more moist.

Supper consisted of the left-over soup from dinner and a cup of "raspberry tea" without sugar. This completed the daily ration.

That evening, by the light of the electric bulb, I discovered an inscription finely scratched on the door: "Today Maxim Gorky honored us with a visit," it read. "He seemed pleased

with his handiwork." It bore no date and no signature.

I detected traces of many other inscriptions on the walls, but they were illegible, except for one near the table. I was just able to make out the words, probably scratched with someone's nails: "How horrible . . . the beasts . . . 10/30/36." The scratchings were fresh, made by some tortured soul a couple of weeks before my arrival. What did the words signify? Did they refer to the human sacrifices made to the Kremlin gods on the eve of the Bolshevik anniversary?

In the morning, the door opened quietly to admit the inspector. He motioned to me to get out of bed, raised the bed, and locked it against the wall, then pointed to the towel and soap, and indicated with a nod of his head the way to the washroom.

As we left the cell, another inspector entered it with a broom. But what was there to sweep? I possessed nothing that could produce any litter.

I had exercised for about ten minutes when the inspector, without uttering a word, motioned me to go back to my cell. It was as foul-smelling as ever—a dark, grim, stone bag. After that hours went by in complete idleness. There was nothing to do but pace up and down. I tried to perch myself on the high stool that was kept fastened to the wall during the daytime hours, but my feet could not reach the floor and I found it painful to sit with my feet dangling.

Dear Lord, if I only had something to do! Or someone to talk with! When would all this end? There was not even a remote ray of hope. With each transfer to a new isolator, conditions became successively worse. In retrospect, the Chelyabinsk Isolator now seemed like a health resort. Yet the will to live is a persistent force. And the religious training of my childhood forbade me to give myself up to despair. I had

to believe that the truth would eventually triumph, that so long as there was life in me there was a possibility of release.

On a clear, frosty day, as I was descending the stairway to the exercise yard, I saw to the right above a high fence the upper part of a newly constructed three- or four-story building. I counted perhaps twenty windows in the top story, all shuttered. The fence was rigged out from top to bottom with barbed wire and in the towers above it were sentries in sheep-skin coats, holding automatic rifles. This was something strange and new to me. Without realizing it, I must have looked too intently and curiously, for the guard who accompanied me yelled, "Keep your eyes down!"

At that moment a sentry in the tower shouted, "I'll shoot you down!"

I hastened toward the exercise yard while the sentry kept up his tirade against me: "That bitch should be kept in the dark hole where she belongs . . . too damned nosy. . . ."

My guard, too, reproached me. "You are not allowed to look there. The sentry has a right to shoot you without warning."

"Oh, you're just making this up to scare me," I said, delighted for the opportunity to exchange a few words with someone. "You know as well as I do that there is nothing special to see there except a high fence and part of the neighboring building."

"Maybe so," my guard grumbled. "But he has the right to shoot you dead, and no one will say a word to him. Better keep your eyes on your feet."

At any rate, I thought, I did get the chance to talk with someone! Thanks for that.

On my return from the walk, I was met by the corps in-

spector who apparently had been told of my "breach of discipline." He warned me that I must never again look at the building surrounded with barbed wire. "Failure to observe this rule will make you liable to the severest punishment."

The following day, during his tour of the isolator, the chief warden, too, took time out to admonish me. "Prisoner Lermolo," he said gravely, "it has been reported to me that you have been scrutinizing the neighboring building. I shan't punish you this time, since you are new here and not familiar with our rules. But should you repeat this offense you will be put in a punitive cell for three to ten days."

I protested that I did not "scrutinize" the neighboring building, that I had merely looked at it, since it was the only object in my field of vision.

"Prisoner, you talk too much!" he said sternly. "You must keep your eyes away from that object. You don't have to look at it. Make believe it isn't there. Have I made myself clear?"

Having gotten somewhat acclimated to the new place, I tried to establish communication with my neighbors. I learned that a fortnight before a large number of prisoners had been moved out of the isolator, and that those who remained had been shifted to new cells.

My neighbor to the right was an actor from Moscow's Bolshoi Theater, a man named Orlovsky. He was nearing the end of his five-year term of imprisonment. Avidly he craved for news from the "free world." He tapped on the wall frequently and extensively. By now I had become very proficient in receiving and transmitting messages and this was a source of great comfort to me.

In the cell to my left was an Orthodox metropolitan from Kazan, Father Cyril. He, too, was highly adept at telegraph-

ing. At great length, he dwelt on the courage shown by the faithful. He urged me not to despair, to pray to the Almighty, and have confidence in Him. From Father Cyril I learned that the cell next to his had a new occupant—a young man held in connection with the Kirov assassination. I asked the metropolitan to tell him my name and to find out his. But the young man refused to identify himself and showed no desire to exchange information with Father Cyril.

The isolator building had unusual acoustic properties. During the night one could hear weird sounds from all sides: sighs, groans, screams, the recitation of prayers, the squeaking of beds, the shouts of inspectors, the hurried steps of guards, the slamming of doors, the racket raised by the emotionally unbalanced prisoners. All these sounds merged into a frightening cacophony which had a depressing effect on me.

One day on my way to the exercise yard, I absent-mindedly lingered for a moment in the stairway leading to the outside door. Compulsively, I glanced in the direction of "that building." However, I caught myself quickly and lowered my eyes, just as the sentry in the tower was about to warn me. It was a narrow escape, but apparently I had got away with it. The guard who accompanied me must have noticed what had happened for he looked at me queerly.

Returning to my cell, I asked the metropolitan by telegraph about the mystery of the neighboring building. He replied that the building housed the so-called Nameless Political Isolator.

"Who is held there?"

"No one knows," he replied. "I learned from former guards here that criminals of the highest order are kept in that isolator. Their names are not known to anyone, not even to the officials of the isolator. They are listed by number only.



No one is permitted to talk with them or answer their questions."

According to Father Cyril, Solovetsk prior to Kirov's assassination was considered one of the most humane places of detention in the country. It was under the protection of the Red Cross, and prisoners were permitted to engage in various activities—literary, scientific, athletic. But even during that tolerant, "liberal" era, the Nameless Isolator was under the strictest regimen. Its windows were always boarded up. One couldn't see a living soul there, nor hear a human word spoken.

"While we could hear all sorts of sounds from the more distant prison blocks on the other side of the Solovetsk Monastery, the Nameless Isolator right next to us was always deadly silent. NKVD Chief Yagoda frequently came out there. Once in 1932 or 1933, it was also visited by Maxim Gorky and his daughter-in-law, the younger Peshkova."

During another telegraph-conversation with the metropolitan, I learned from him that all the buildings and shrines of the monastery had been taken over by the Administration of the Solovetsk Concentration Camps, the so-called *USLON*—a vast enterprise with numerous offices, warehouses, supply depots. Nearly all the work was done by the prisoners, the heavier work by the "politicals." There were many thousands of them—both criminal and political prisoners.

"Father," I said to him, "I'd love to work. Could you advise me how to get myself transferred to a work camp? Where do I apply? How do I go about it?"

"My dear child," he replied, "inmates of political isolators are denied the right to work. They are obliged to languish in idleness. Transfers from isolators to forced labor camps are forbidden. There is no way of getting out of a political iso-

lator any more." And he concluded, as always: "I give you my blessing. Rely on the Lord and He will serve you. For He is mighty—we are all in His hands."

A couple of months after my arrival at the Solovetsk Political Isolator, I began to feel sharp pains in my joints. The walks became a physical torment. Then one winter morning, rising from bed after a sleepless night, my face felt queer. Touching it with my hand, I discovered that my mouth was dislocated—twisted almost to my left ear. I tried to pull it back into place but couldn't. Alarmed, I ran to the door and banged on it.

The *fortochka* opened. I yelled into it: "I don't feel well. I'm ill. Take me to the doctor."

The guard listened to me in stony silence, then slammed shut the *fortochka*. . . . He didn't say "Yes" or "No." Again I banged on the door. For the second time the *fortochka* opened.

"Don't you understand?" I pleaded: "Please take me to the doctor. I am very sick. Can't you see what has happened to me?"

"Do you want to be put in a punitive cell?" the guard growled. The *fortochka* slammed shut. Finished.

It was not until late that afternoon that I was finally taken to the infirmary. To keep warm for the walk outdoors, I was given a cotton sweater to wear under my flannel robe. It was an icy night. My body shivered from the cold and I kept slipping on the snow with my wooden-soled shoes. A few times I fell.

The infirmary was located in the former Uspensky Cathedral of the Solovetsk Kremlin, inside an ancient wall. The perfumed and resplendent physician in a resplendent Chekist

uniform under his snowy white robe, diagnosed my case as a form of psychoneurasthenia.

When the guard inquired whether I was to remain in the prison hospital, the doctor replied, "I'd like to keep her here, but there is no room. We are overcrowded as it is. There has been an unusual influx of the sick and ailing. Let's wait a while and see how her sickness progresses. Here are ten pills, you'll give her one each night. I advise the patient," the doctor continued without looking at me, "to pull herself together. She's still young and could, if she puts her mind to it, recover."

On the way back to the isolator, I encountered several prisoners heading for the infirmary—emaciated, sickly, pathetic-looking people who contrasted strikingly with their tough Chekist guards in glistening uniform. These guards of the Solovetsk Political Isolator were "model" troops, considering themselves superior to their fellow guards at the Chelyabinsk and Krasnoyarsk isolators.

"They belong to a peculiar species of man," Orlovsky told me through the wall. "They are overfed, overwined, overtrained, and completely heartless, devoid of all feeling of compassion. They are not, in fact, quite human. To display sympathy is regarded by them as bourgeois and beneath the dignity of a Chekist."

I was curious. Where, I asked, do they find people like that? How are they recruited?

"They are hand-picked from the ranks of the regular NKVD troops," Orlovsky explained. "The Solovetsk Political Isolator is the pride of the NKVD. The Chekists here draw the highest salaries. Service in Solovetsk is considered a great honor. This is the oldest Soviet political isolator. The guards here have their traditions—vigilance, hatred of political prison-

ers, ability to act decisively and ruthlessly to stamp out trouble."

One evening in January, 1937, returning from my exercise, I saw three guards dragging through the corridor a swerving, kicking human figure whose mouth was stuffed with a rag. I was immediately ordered to turn my face to the wall. But from the choked groaning of the person I was able to tell that it was a woman.

What I saw so shocked me that I could barely sleep that night. The next day I had a fierce headache and my entire body felt feverish. My legs seemed aflame. The following night I felt worse. I couldn't breathe, had nightmares and hallucinations. Each time I awoke, I wept long and loud—hysterically, uncontrollably.

Then suddenly in the middle of the night I felt someone's hands on my head and my shoulder. As I opened my eyes, a brute of a guard pressed his perspiring hand on my throat. Choking, I involuntarily opened my mouth, whereupon the guard stuffed a filthy rag into it. Other guards seized me by my hands and feet and I was carried out of the cell to the corridor, then down the corridor into another cell. There they took the rag out of my mouth and locked me in.

I found myself in a small cubicle without windows, the walls, ceiling, floor, and door covered with rubber padding. At the ceiling a tiny electric bulb enclosed in a wire cage gave off the barest glimmer. There was not a single object in the cell.

I began to scream, I beat my fists against the door, against the walls. I raged until I lost my voice and my strength. But no one responded. Exhausted, I sank to the floor. . . .

I lost consciousness of time. I tried to knock on the floor in

a more restrained manner, but the sounds brought no response. Frustrated and worn out, I lay down again motionless—unfeeling, unthinking. . . . After a while, I became very hungry, but I continued to lie on the floor. . . .

Softly the door opened and a soft voice said, "All right, you can go now."

As soon as I got back to my cell, dinner was served. Ravenously, I attacked the food. Soon there was a tapping on the wall—from the metropolitan's cell.

"I was worried. What happened? Where were you?"

Briefly I reported to him.

"My daughter," said the metropolitan, "try to keep out of that sobering cell (that's what they call it). Pray continually to the dear Lord. There are evil spirits in this place. For the past year and a half literally scores of prisoners who were confined to the sobering cell wound up in the psychiatric ward of 'The Crosses' in Leningrad. None has ever come back to the isolator. Only recently, one of the newly arrived women prisoners, a Katya Rogacheva, was taken away to 'The Crosses.'"

"Katya Rogacheva? When?" I inquired in amazement.

"She was taken away the day before yesterday."

Was it possible that Katya had cracked up? I could not believe it, she was so tough and hard. If she couldn't stand it, who could?

I appealed for help to the metropolitan. "Father," I pleaded, "you tell me that I must try to keep out of the sobering cell. But how? I am no longer able to control my nerves. The prison atmosphere is impairing not only my physical health but my mental health."

He tried to comfort me. "The Lord is merciful, my child," he said. "Have faith in Him." He also suggested that I discuss

the problem with my neighbor, Orlovsky, that he could advise me how to preserve my mental balance.

I tapped on Orlovsky's wall, and he professed himself very happy to teach me what was called "the psychological self-defense system." It was imperative, he said, to observe certain rules—and he recited a long list of Do's and Don'ts.

"First, you must detach yourself from reality—stop thinking of yourself as a prisoner. Make believe that you are a tourist who temporarily finds himself in an unfamiliar environment. Don't admit to yourself that conditions here are very bad, because they may get even worse, and you should be prepared for that. Don't become too involved in the everyday life of the isolator. Try not to hear its sounds, especially at night, or to smell its smells. Try not to be aware of the guards, don't look at them, ignore the expression on their faces. Stop making-believe about the possibility of your being released soon from the isolator. Do not attempt to regain your freedom by means of a hunger strike, or by admitting your guilt, or by appealing for mercy to the authorities. Stop pining for the friends you have left behind in the free world."

That, he explained, was lesson Number One. The following day, he tapped out lesson Number Two, which concluded the instructions:

"Fill all your waking hours with self-imposed tasks: exercise, sponge your body with cold water, then give yourself a thorough rubdown with a towel. Devote at least an hour to this each day after breakfast. Do it slowly, so as not to increase your heartbeat. Pace up and down your cell two hundred times before dinner, three hundred times after dinner, and two hundred times again before retiring. You can keep count by making small balls out of bread—ten tiny balls and ten larger ones. One large ball would be the equivalent of ten tiny ones.

Before dinner each day, memorize one prayer or poem. (The metropolitan and I will help you.) After dinner tell yourself a story based on your own experience or someone else's experience."

Before signing off he admonished me to be "sure to masticate your food thoroughly—chew it at least sixty times before you swallow it." This amused me. The food we were served, I pointed out, was so thin and overcooked that there was no need to chew it.

But he stuck to his theory. "Unless you have chewed the food thoroughly," he insisted, "don't swallow it. The proper mastication of food in our circumstances is highly important."

I expressed doubt that anyone could possibly have enough will power to adhere to all the rules he had set forth.

"Don't say that," he protested. "There are many of us here who practice the psychological self-defense system. You can't lose anything by it." A year and a half ago, he told me, he too had made the acquaintance of the sobering cell. But after that, at the advice of the old prisoners, he pulled himself together and began to practice the rules he had prescribed for me, with the result that he had made a complete adjustment. "I've cheated the Clickists out of a psychopathic patient. Through self-discipline, my mind has remained free."

I decided to try Orlovsky's prescription. Summoning what physical and spiritual strength I had left, I applied myself to his system, filling my free hours with the exercises he suggested. From the very first day I was happier because of the absorbing, time-consuming tasks. Gradually, I began to improve on the quality of my "programs," and to derive a certain creative satisfaction from them. I improvised songs, poems, stories. They evoked long-forgotten sentiments—feelings of

love and joy. The fifteen waking hours each day became filled with meaning.

I recalled long-forgotten impressions and incidents which were stored in the deep recesses of my mind. I reconstructed almost word for word the stories I had heard from my fellow prisoners. I made an effort to memorize names, dates, and places. Nor did I neglect to chew my food slowly and carefully, despite the weakened condition of my teeth. I also went on long walks about my cell, covering literally several miles each day. The only thing I could not do for a long time was simulate the feeling of being a tourist.

As the result of all this, an amazing transformation took place. I began to notice that the despair in my heart was giving way to a state of calmness, an inner tranquillity. There was even a stirring of warm emotions within me, which manifested itself more and more frequently. Often I could feel myself smiling.

This went on for a while, how long I do not know. And then, rather suddenly, I relapsed into a depressed state again. No matter how hard I tried, I found that I could not bear any longer the indefiniteness of my status. With the approach of spring, I resolved to make a final break with it all—either freedom or death.

Accordingly, one day when the chief warden stopped off in my cell during his tour of the isolator, I detained him. "Comrade Chief," I began, "I've . . ."

But he interrupted me rudely. "What the hell kind of a comrade am I to you?" he shouted. "The devil is your comrade. Don't you know how to address me?"

"I beg your pardon . . . Citizen Chief," I corrected myself. "As you know," I continued, "I've been kept in prisons and political isolators since December, 1934. But I've never



been told the verdict in my case. To this day, I have no idea why I've been imprisoned nor what my sentence is. I, therefore, formally request to be apprised of my verdict. Otherwise, I shall be compelled to go on a hunger strike."

"Don't threaten me with hunger strikes," he said. "We'll have none of that."

"It's no idle threat. I mean it," I replied in a firm tone.

He said he'd query Moscow and let me know in about a week.

"All right, I'll wait."

More than two weeks went by before the chief warden made his next tour of inspection. When I reminded him of my request, he said ponderously, "There's no use even to discuss it. You cannot be informed of the verdict because you refused to sign the protocols of the preliminary hearing."

"But, Citizen Chief," I argued, "you yourself will agree that to keep me in detention for two years without a verdict is contrary to Soviet law. You know very well that the reason I did not sign the protocols is because they did not contain a word of truth. If my guilt had been established, I should be told my verdict; if it has not been established, I should be released. It has to be one or the other."

"Prisoner Lernolo," he replied irritably, "if you were innocent you would not be kept in a political isolator. Such things are not done in the Soviet Union. This is not your old capitalist regime."

"I understand," I said. "But since I am being held illegally and without a reasonable explanation, I am left only one recourse—the hunger strike. I am giving you notice that starting Monday I am going on strike and shall continue it until my request is satisfied."

"We regard hunger strikes as hostile acts against the govern-

ment," he warned me. "But if you are determined, you must make out a declaration to that effect. I shall send you paper and ink. Is there anything else?" And without waiting for a reply, he departed.

This exchange took place on a Saturday afternoon. That same day I was brought a sheet of paper, a pen, and an inkwell. These plain, everyday objects thrilled me. I caressed them, kissed them, wept over them. Too bad that they could not be used for a more worth-while purpose—to write letters or to jot down ideas, even to record the poems and songs I had composed.

Having written out the declaration about my projected hunger strike, I gave it to the guard to take to the warden.

Sunday night, after dinner, the corps inspector and a woman inspector came to see me. Carefully they searched every nook and cranny of the cell. They took away from me some bread crumbs which I had saved, and also removed the soap and towel. The woman inspector then subjected me to a thorough bodily search. Lastly, the corps inspector inquired whether I was planning a dry hunger strike or a wet hunger strike. Dry, I replied—which meant that I was not going to take food or water.

They departed, and after that for a period of six days no one showed up. I remained in the cell alone, completely ignored. In reply to the tapplings from my neighbors, I merely told them that I was on a hunger strike and discouraged further telegraphing.

The first two or three days I suffered a great deal—I wanted food so desperately that it made me at once dizzy and nauseated. But later on, the sharp desire for food subsided and there ensued days of apathy and utter numbness.

The following Saturday, at lunch time, five men descended

on me--the corps inspector, three guards, and the medic. At the inspector's command, the three guards took hold of my hands, feet, and head. The medic, assisted by the inspector, pried open my mouth and forced down my throat a rubber tube which was connected to a glass jar. Some sort of liquid started gushing down my throat. My body quivered, there were spasms in my throat, a sharp pain in my stomach. . . .

When this operation ended, the inspector announced that my hunger strike was over. I didn't have the strength to protest. Thus my first and only hunger strike was broken.

At the next periodic visit by the warden, I asked him if there had been any word from Moscow about my status.

"Why don't you quit fussing?" he growled. "You ought to be glad you're still alive." Turning to a man with him, he remarked, "Let her lie here for a couple of days more and then transfer her out."

The hunger strike availed me nothing. It only led to my transfer to another political isolator.

In May, 1937, I was taken out of Solovetsk. I had spent six long months there. During that entire period I hadn't seen a single prisoner, I had not been called once for interrogation. Did that mean, I wondered, that the investigation of my case had been completed, that I was serving out my sentence? There was no way of finding out.

This time, there was no ceremony prior to my departure. There was no final interview with the chief warden, similar to the one I had had the year before at Chelyabinsk. Nor was I given any instruction on how I was to conduct myself during the trip. It was all done quietly, efficiently, and almost wordlessly: I was taken to the bathhouse. There, my prison garments were taken away from me and I was given back my own

clothes, which were now in a somewhat more wrinkled condition. Then I was taken to the *kommendatura*, the isolator office. Presently, Claudia (known as "the feeler") was summoned. She was a big, heavy-set woman of about thirty-five, with a mannish hair-do and tobacco-stained fingers, dressed in an expensive Chekist uniform. She examined my hair, teeth, fingernails, then sternly ordered me to "bend over" and, using rubber gloves, completed the inspection. The search over, she barked, "That's all." Next came the inspection of my belongings. This was done by a special convoy of seven guards. One of them signed for me and was handed my dossier, sealed with red wax. "Let's go," he yelled, and out we went.

I was in a less sanguine mood than I had been the year before, even though I again traveled in a "soft car" and was again expected to conduct myself like a "proud lady." My escorts on this trip were more trimly attired. They were also more conscientious about their work, and exasperatingly uncommunicative.

Throughout the journey, I had a grinding anxiety about having failed to say good-by to my dear neighbors at Solovetsk. What would they think of me? It was uncomradely and cowardly of me! Each had given me something of the utmost value: Father Cyril, the comfort of religion, a renewed faith that I was not forsaken by God; Orlovsky, a way of occupying myself constructively though all normal pursuits of life were denied me, possibly my sanity.

## *Chapter XVIII*

WE ARRIVED AT A SMALL BRIGHTLY ILLUMINED suburban station on a warm spring evening. An animated throng of perhaps fifty commuters got off the train with us, then the train went on. Within five minutes the platform was deserted. The senior guard went to the station master's office to telephone for a car while the rest of the guards and I seated ourselves on the platform bench to wait.

On either side of the railroad track were summer homes surrounded by orchards. Above the cottages a full moon dodged through clouds. I inhaled deeply the fragrant, intoxicating country air. We were all silent.

To my delight, the car (the usual Black Maria) was late in arriving. When it finally came in about an hour, we all piled into it and rode for another hour. Our destination, as it turned out, was the Butyrki Prison, in Moscow.

Here I was placed in a large cell already occupied by fifteen or twenty women. Though it was nearly eleven at night, the women were still awake. They were an unusually well-dressed group. One could tell from their faces that they had been engaged in a lively conversation which my arrival had interrupted. I was embarrassed. The dress I wore had gone through several disinfections, and was faded and wrinkled. I knew that I looked haggard and scarecrowish.

It was clear to see that the women were not favorably impressed with my general appearance. They gave me a rather cool reception, and promptly began to prepare themselves for bed. None of them, except the stewardess, greeted me and—what was more unusual under prison conditions—none of them showed any interest in me or asked me any questions.

The stewardess arranged a place for me on the floor, requesting one of the women who had "spread herself out too widely" to move over. Then she entered my name on a roll of prisoners in the cell and invited me to feel "at home." In a whisper she explained that the occupants of this cell were not ordinary prisoners. They were decent and respectable women—in fact, the cream of Soviet society. Every one of them, including herself, was the wife of an important government or party official who had recently been purged. Because they were wives of so-called "traitors," they had been sentenced by a special commission of the NKVD to terms of up to eight years in concentration camp. They were in jail here awaiting the next convoy.

"Please do not feel abashed," she said gently. "Make yourself as comfortable as you can. You must realize that these women are still unaccustomed to prison life. Most of them have been in jail only a week or two. For this reason, they are rather shocked by your appearance. But don't mind that."

As I stretched out on the floor, I looked around me at my cellmates. Their clothes were indeed smart, even luxurious. Most of them had stylish hair arrangements, manicured fingernails, rouged lips. Their improvised beds on the floor were not the makeshift accommodations of ordinary prisoners. The air was filled with perfume and the scent of rare, imported Turkish tobacco.

Beside me was a woman of about thirty, with a beautiful

figure and an attractive, though somewhat capricious, face. The transparent silk nightgown she wore showed off to advantage the classic lines of her well-cared-for body. As I subsequently learned, she was an actress at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. Creaming her face for the night, she broke the silence by declaiming indignantly to no one in particular: "We'll show them. You wait and see, we'll show them. The scoundrels! The idea of sentencing us to eight years! They think they can get away with it. Well, they haven't heard the last of it. We'll show them."

She turned to me. "Do you realize what's going on? The best people in the country have been removed from their posts and thrown into jail where they are being tortured for no reason at all. And now their wives are being persecuted too. The wives, it develops, are also guilty. It's the fault of the wives. They corrupted their husbands, encouraged bourgeois tendencies in them, drove them to commit criminal acts against the government. What rot!"

Her husband, she told me, was an old and loyal Chekist with a splendid service record and recipient of the seven highest decorations. Yet, no sooner did "that sexless creature" Yezhov take over the NKVD than her husband was declared "an enemy of the people." He wasn't the only victim. The entire leadership of the NKVD was purged. For a while, the only one in the top echelon who seemed to have weathered the storm was Agranov. But recently he, too, had disappeared.

"Everyone these days," she said bitterly, "is an 'enemy of the people,' except Yezhov's cronies. They, I suppose, are 'friends of the people.'" She leaned closer to me, "Mark my words, my dear," she said in a confident tone, "there'll soon be an end to that. You wait and see. The tide will turn. We'll show them then! They'll never forget it!"

Vigorously, she proceeded to massage her face. "What about you, my dear?" she asked. "Are you here, too, because of your husband? Was he a federal or a regional official?"

"Yes . . . I'm here, too, because of my husband," I replied evasively, then added, "I wasn't arrested recently; I've been in jail for several years."

"You've been in jail for several years? Poor thing! And, you say, because of your husband? I can't understand it. When were you arrested?"

In 1931, I told her, but I had been in jail since 1934. This struck her as very strange—that in former years, too, women were arrested and exiled because of their husbands. "Girls," she called to the others, "did you know that? My neighbor here tells me that she, too, was arrested because of her husband. But she has been in jail for several years!"

Her startling discovery had little effect on the cellmates. One elderly woman suggested that she contain herself and "let the others rest in peace."

"That's Madame Averbach, Yagoda's wife," my neighbor whispered. "She still thinks she's the boss lady. . . . It's time she realized her position. So," in her normal voice, "things like that also happened in former years?"

"Indeed, they did, and very frequently," I replied. "Only the victims in those days were a different breed of women, wives of a different breed of men."

"Strange. We all thought . . . that is, I was convinced that these outrages were introduced by Yezhov when he took over the NKVD. It's incredible! And what was the charge against you?"

I left the question unanswered.

"Strange," she repeated. "We are the so-called MFT's—Members of the Families of Traitors." And she went on to say



how ridiculous it was to charge as traitors men who had dedicated their lives to the socialist fatherland. "It was all the doings of that Iron Commissar, Yezhov," she declared.

"This may blow over as far as you and your friends are concerned," I suggested. "After all, you belong to the same political party as Yezhov. It's really a sort of family squabble among you. Why don't you appeal to the NKVD or the higher-ups?"

They had tried that, she said. "But here is the absurdity of our position. We haven't committed any crime. Therefore, we can't make any confession. Nor can we deny the charge against us, since the only thing we are charged with is being the wives of so-called 'enemies of the people.' It's probably different in your case. Since you and your husband have been in jail for several years, then obviously you must have committed some sort of crime. But I and all these women here are completely innocent."

I tried hard to curb my annoyance with this perfumed, self-centered woman, as I asserted that I too was innocent, and reminded her of the liquidation of the kulaks as well as the reign of terror following Kirov's assassination. "All that happened not so very long ago. Is it possible that you have forgotten?"

Yes, of course she remembered, she assured me. But that was different. The measures undertaken then were prompted by the highest political considerations. They were not the whims of a maniac like Yezhov.

She paused. "You say that you, too, are innocent. How curious. And where are they sending you? Not with us?" The idea seemed to alarm her.

"Possibly," I replied. "I don't know. I have no idea why I

was brought here from the Solovetsk Political Isolator, nor where they plan to send me."

"Oh, you were in a po . . . political isolator? Then you must be one of the . . . how are they called?"

She couldn't quite utter the word "counterrevolutionary," and turned aside in confusion. After a while she moved away from me. With that our conversation ended.

The other women ignored me completely.

New times, new tunes!

## *Chapter X I X*

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, AFTER BREAKFAST, I was ordered to gather my belongings and a few minutes later I was handed over to the guards of a new convoy who put me into a Black Maria with an elderly cadaverous-looking woman. We were driven to a small railroad station, different from the one where I had gotten off the night before.

For nearly a half-hour we waited for the train to arrive. When it finally came, my traveling companion and I were placed in a prison car where we soon fell into conversation. The woman's name was Sofia Nikitina, and she told me that she had been in political isolators since 1932.

"You are probably the wife of a former high official?" she inquired.

"No, a White Guardist," I replied.

She seemed glad to hear that. She, too, was a White Guardist, she said. "Maybe we are both going to the same place. We are probably being taken to the Suzdal Isolator. This train goes to Suzdal. I was there only a few months ago." The Suzdal Isolator, she added, was the place of detention for people connected with the Kremlin. For a long time Allilueva's maid was kept there. "I, too, am involved in a Kremlin affair."

I pricked up my ears. "Not in connection with Allilueva's death?" I asked.

"No. Another case," she said. "You may have heard of it. The attempt on Stalin's life by Zoya Nikitina."

"Zoya Nikitina? That name sounds familiar."

"Perhaps you met her somewhere?" the old lady asked hopefully.

Where had I heard that name? Then I remembered. It was at the May First demonstration at the Chelyabinsk Isolator. The name was cheered by the Social Revolutionaries. They had honored Leonid Nikolayev and Zoya Nikitina. I told the old woman about it.

"Nikolayev?" she said. "Now wasn't he the Communist who killed Kirov? But why was her name linked with his? You say that the Social Revolutionaries paid honor to Zoya at the May First meeting in the isolator. Goodness me, how mixed up things have become. My precious, beautiful little Zoichka is honored somewhere in an isolator in Chelyabinsk, and—of all people—by the Social Revolutionaries. Lord, have mercy on us!" She sighed softly.

We remained silent for a while. The train had stopped at a station and we realized that our conversation might be overheard by the guards.

As soon as the train started again, the old woman moved closer to me and said in a half-whisper, "I'm Zoya Nikitina's aunt. And that's why they've kept me locked up in political isolators. I am no politician. I know nothing about politics. The only thing I'm guilty of is being Zoya's aunt. True, I brought her up. I reared her, educated her. She grew up to be a healthy, wholesome, pure girl. Did I raise her to be a political assassin? God forbid. How could I? Nothing was further from my mind."

She offered to tell me how it happened. Even had I not been curious, I would have listened, for the poor woman was eager to unburden her heart to someone.

Her husband was a merchant, she said. He was called to the colors in 1914 and the following year was killed near Warsaw. Their only son had died before the war so Nikitina was left alone, living in their summer home not far from Moscow. The revolution came. Then in the fall of 1917 her husband's brother, a Czarist officer, and his wife, a Red Cross nurse, decided to flee from Moscow to the south to join General Kornilov's anti-Bolshevik forces. They had two little girls, Zoichka who was ten and Liudochka, eight. They asked Sofia Nikitina to take their daughters into her home and look after them. In addition to the children, they left in her care all their possessions—furniture, jewelry, everything.

"They had thought, of course, that all this was just for a short while, that the Bolsheviks would soon be defeated and that they would return home. Where they are now only the dear Lord knows."

The years went by, the little girls stayed with her, and she came to care for them as if they were her own daughters. As a matter of fact, she registered as the widow of a fallen soldier and the mother of two fatherless children. By renting part of her summer cottage and doing odd sewing jobs on the side she managed to eke out a living.

Sofia Nikitina raised the girls in the Orthodox faith, gave them a good Christian education. They grew up to be well-behaved, responsible young ladies. Both of them studied in the Gymnasium. The elder, Zoya, was a very thoughtful child, read a lot, but she was also interested in sports. She was a parachutist and one of the first women to make the parachute jump at the Tushinsk Aerodrome.

"Then one day," Sofia Nikitina said, "when Zoichka was ready to graduate from the *Gymnasium*, she suddenly said to me, 'Auntie,' she said, 'I must have a serious talk with you.'"

The aunt thought she must be planning to get married, but the girl said No—that she had been thinking about her future and had decided to join the *Komsomol*.

"You can imagine how I felt. I could not believe my ears. 'What is this, Zoichka?' I said to her. 'Haven't you the fear of God in you? How can you join that band of atheists?'"

The girl insisted that she would never be an atheist, that she would remain true in her heart to the views of her parents and would be a *Komsomolka* only on the surface. "I shall be like a radish—red on top but white inside," she said, and tried to make her aunt understand that she had no other choice. Whether she decided upon university or career, preference would be given to Communists and members of the *Komsomol*. Her only hope of a decent job with advancement was to take out membership in the young people's group.

"I thought about it," said Sofia Nikitina, "shed a few tears, and decided not to stand in her way. After all, I thought to myself, what else can the child do? If you live with wolves, you have to howl like a wolf. But I made her promise not to act like these wild, godless *Komsomol* girls, to remember that she came from a decent family."

Zoya promised, saying, "I'm joining the *Komsomol* out of necessity. And I'm not joining it alone. There are five of us from our class who have decided to do it, and we have promised to stay together."

So with her aunt's reluctant permission, Zoya joined the *Komsomol*. When she finished the *Gymnasium*, she obtained a position in a cellulose factory, and there it was arranged for her to take evening courses in library work. About a year later,

a seemingly devoted Komsomol member, she won a post at the Lenin Library in Moscow where she began to mingle in high circles. Another couple of years and she was admitted to the Academy of Arts, where she studied painting and also posed for artists.

"Paintings for which she modeled became very popular," her aunt told me. "I remember one called 'The Russian Maiden' in which Zoichka looked so beautiful that people would gaze at it for hours. A poet was so smitten by it that he composed an ode to her."

In short, Zoya became the center of an admiring circle of artists and poets. Then came her daring parachute jump and she became, according to Sofia Nikitina, the toast of all Russia. Even the people in the Kremlin became interested in her. Yenukidze, the Georgian (mentor of Stalin and a man high in artistic and party circles), called on her and would take her to the Bolshoi Theater, to operas and ballets, and to important party gatherings. Through him she met the highest government officials.

"Zoichka made a fine impression everywhere. She would allow no one to take any liberties with her. She conducted herself with propriety, as might be expected of a decently brought up young woman," her aunt assured me.

One day in the summer of 1932 Zoya came home and told her aunt that she had been invited to the Kremlin the following week. Yenukidze had commissioned her to catalogue and rearrange the books in Stalin's library. Since this was such an important event, Zoya asked her aunt to make her a new dress.

"We picked a pattern, she brought the silk from town, and in a few days I had the dress ready. It was a pretty dress, with a cape—modest and yet very smart looking. I remember that I

had advised a different fashion, but Zoya insisted on a dress with a cape."

A few days later, in the morning, Yenukidze came for her. Zoya was pale and very nervous. In saying good-by, she hugged her aunt and whispered, "Auntie dear, please bless me in my undertaking." Sofia Nikitina made the sign of the cross over her, kissed her, and wished her success. The car drove away. "I never saw my Zoichka again. . . ."

Sofia Nikitina was arrested that same day. Her house was turned upside down, and buried in the garden the NKVD found a sealed jar containing letters from abroad written by Zoya's father.

"The Clickists tortured me for weeks and weeks . . . only the dear Lord knows what I went through. They wanted to find out who had delivered the letters to Zoya. And I, as the Lord is my witness, knew nothing about these letters. When Zoya got them, how, and through whom—I had no idea. . . . You couldn't count the number of people who were arrested! Of the four who had joined the Komsomol with Zoya, two managed to escape—a boy and a girl. The other two I saw at the confrontations I had with them. They were covered with blood, they had been beaten to a pulp . . . Lord have mercy on them!"

All who had ever known Zoya—no matter how slightly—were rounded up by the NKVD, and thrown into jail—those who had accepted her into the Komsomol, those who admitted her to the library school, those who arranged for her to work in the Lenin Library, those who taught her how to parachute, those who painted her, "and even those who admired her beauty."

I asked Sofia Nikitina what was in the letters that the NKVD found



"I don't know," she replied. "I was never shown them. But judging by the questions put to me during the three months of my interrogation, I gather that my Zoichka had planned for a long time to use any sort of ruse to get inside the Kremlin, that she had orders from abroad to kill Stalin, and that she failed because Stalin himself had gotten wind of it."

We noticed that a guard was watching us through the barred door and we stopped talking. Some time later that day, the train arrived at Vladimir. There our car was detached and left at a siding. Nearby was the inevitable Black Maria. A two-hour trip in it brought us to the Suzdal Political Isolator.

## *Chapter X X*

THE ANCIENT STRUCTURES OF THE ORTHODOX monastery at Suzdal are surrounded by a high stone fence. There are towering trees in the enclosure. Farther on, is a fruit orchard. Then to the right, inside another tall fence, stands a solitary building—the political isolator.

In the kommandatura of the isolator, we went through the usual procedure: the registration, the examination of personal belongings, the body search, the visit to the bathhouse, the change into prison garments, and the assignment to a cell. At first, I had been offended and humiliated by this degrading procedure. Now it no longer mattered to me. I had gotten used to it.

The cell I was taken to had a low, arched ceiling, thick walls, a stone floor, a long, narrow, barred window covered with shutters. The furnishings were the same as in the Solovetsk Isolator. There was a biting, rheumatic dampness in the place. Walks were limited to fifteen minutes, and they were held in a barricaded, roofless passage, ten yards long and two wide.

During my first few days here a great calamity befell me—the warehouse where the prisoners' personal belongings were stored went up in smoke. Everything I had was destroyed in the fire: a fur coat, several dresses, underclothes, shoes, ga-

loshies. The realization that there was no longer anything I could call my own had a shattering effect on me--not family, freedom, not even clothes. I was reduced to being merely another fixture in the isolator, a sort of inanimate object.

I didn't grieve for the things *per se*. They were inexpensive. I grieved because I had lost something that was mine, something that belonged to me and no one else, that linked me with the free world, that made me feel that my detention in the isolator was only temporary, that I was not just a prisoner, but also a human being.

Having lost my personal possessions, I felt that I had also lost the last semblance of self-dignity.

One day while on my way to the exercise yard I noticed that there was a great deal of activity in the isolator. The inspectors and guards were scrubbing and cleaning the place, checking the shutters on the windows, closely examining the walls and furnishings in the cells to see if there were any inscriptions on them by prisoners.

This bustling went on for more than a day. Then the corps inspector came to apprise me that the chief was expected to arrive in the isolator in about an hour. "Now here is what I want you to do," he instructed me. "As the chief comes into your cell, you are to pace up and down as if absorbed in thought. He's not to find you leaning against the wall or sitting on the stool. Understand? The moment he enters the cell you are to come to attention and greet him. You are to say to him, 'Good day, Citizen Chief.' Understand? Everything has to be carried off just as I tell you, otherwise I'll put you in the punitive cell."

An hour or two passed. Suddenly the door of my cell was thrown open with great ceremony. At the threshold was the

chief warden holding a stack of dossiers. Behind him was a short, stoop-shouldered man with a single dossier in his hand. Near them was a towering brute carrying a tommy-gun.

The little man asked my name. I told him.

"The charge and term of sentence?"

"I don't know the charge or the term of sentence."

"Why were you jailed?"

"I don't know," I replied.

The warden hurriedly whispered something into his ear. The little man scrutinized me closely. I stared back. He looked familiar to me. Suddenly I recalled who he was—Yezhov himself, who with Agranov had grilled me so mercilessly. Now he was attired in a new, gold-braided Chekist uniform and seemed considerably slimmer. Did he recognize me? I doubted it. In the two and a half years that had elapsed, I had changed incredibly.

"I trust you are going to release me now," I said, looking him straight in the eye. "After all, you can't keep me locked up indefinitely without any charge against me, without any court verdict."

The warden scowled at me, motioning to me to shut up. Yezhov made no reply. With a thick red pencil he jotted something down in the dossier and handed it to the warden. Then he turned abruptly and stalked out. The warden and the giant with the tommy-gun followed him. The door of my cell was slammed shut. A grave-like silence descended on the corridor.

Some time later, I overheard a guard tell one of his colleagues that the chief "found everything fine" in our cell block. The only order he issued was to confine prisoner Yenukidze to the disciplinary cell.

That same month, June, 1937, I was taken to the main infirmary for a smallpox inoculation. The infirmary was located at the other end of the monastery grounds, nearly a mile's walk through the vast fruit orchard. The guard kept nagging at me to "step livelier," but I intentionally walked slowly in order to breathe in as much of the clean, fresh air as possible.

In the infirmary I was met by the corps inspector and a young, impetuous physician. The latter felt my pulse, nodded, then, after examining against the light a syringe which was filled with a green liquid, he said to me, "I'm giving you an antityphus injection."

"Not smallpox?"

"Oh, well . . . it's the same thing. Take off your robe and roll up your sleeve. Stand still," he ordered, and plunged the needle into my arm. The needle was inordinately thick. I screamed. The corps inspector and guard took hold of me. The physician pierced the needle in deeper, then slowly pulled it out.

"That's done," he said. "Call in the next prisoner. And let's try to speed it up a bit. It's taking much too long."

I was led back to the isolator by a different route, presumably so as not to run into other prisoners who were coming for their shots. On the way I began to feel ill, and as soon as I crossed the threshold of my cell I started to vomit. For the rest of the day I suffered from nausea. My head ached, I felt feverish, every part of my body was in pain.

By nightfall I heard groans from all the cells around me. The women wept, called for the doctor, demanded water, banged with their fists against the door. The guards ignored the clamor.

In the morning, the corps inspector came into my cell and,

despite my protests, folded the bed against the wall and locked it.

On the third day, I discovered to my horror that my hair was falling out. At first I thought it was a nightmare. But, alas, it was only too true. It was falling out by fistfuls, until soon I was quite bald. To add to my feeling of panic at this development, all around me I heard the shrieks of prisoners who were no doubt similarly affected. The women, in particular, were hysterical. But the officials of the isolator remained unmoved. One woman who had screamed and shouted incessantly was put in a strait jacket.

In providing me with a small kerchief to cover my head, the corps inspector tried to reassure me. "The injection," he said, "was not harmful. It won't endanger your life or impair your health. The doctor assumes full responsibility. It was done for your own good."

"I don't want you to do anything for my good. Let me out of jail and I'll take care of myself."

"That's not up to me. The chiefs will decide that."

It took several weeks before some hair began to grow again on my head, and that was sparse and unusually soft. I was under constant observation by the same young physician who seemed pleased with the results of his "mass experiment." At his behest, my head was shaved several times and rubbed with ointment.

By fall, my hair had grown about one to one and a half inches. But it continued to be very thin and weak. At each combing, much of it would fall out.

The cells on my right and left were occupied, respectively, by a woman and a man. The woman, unfortunately, did not know the prison alphabet and I could not communicate with

her. The man was a Communist-Zinovievite named Rozman, an Austrian who had been taken prisoner by the Russians in 1915.

While still in the prisoner-of-war camp in Kazan, he established contact with a Bolshevik underground organization, and later he took an active part in the Bolshevik uprising. The civil war ended, he stayed on in Russia, married a Russian girl, and enrolled at the Kazan University. After his graduation, he took a post with the State Planning Commission in Moscow, which gained him entree to the highest Communist circles. He was a frequent guest at the home of the Bakayevs.

The party bosses at one time reprimanded him for his Zinovievite leanings, and in the spring a year before he had been arrested for allegedly belonging to a secret Zinovievite-Trotskyist organization. But though he was tortured for a long time at the Lubyanka Prison in an effort to persuade him to testify at one of the show trials, although his wife had sent a declaration to the NKVD renouncing him for his antiparty activities and asking the right to change her name, he held out and refused to be browbeaten into confession. Consequently, he was banished, maimed and ill, to this isolator. Transported with him were several of Zinoviev's closest associates in the Communist International.

At present, Rozman said, they were trying to implicate him in the activities of the Rightist-Trotskyist Bloc. The NKVD was now accusing him of having sabotaged the plans of the Food Ministry, thereby causing the famine of 1933, no less!

"Nearly every night I'm summoned for interrogation. The Chekists are getting rough again. One chap decided to use force on me. But I doubt if he'll try that again. Each night this isolator becomes transformed into a Chekist factory for the manufacture of confessions."

## *Chapter* X X I

LATE IN THE SUMMER OF 1937 I WAS STRICKEN again with dysentery and was assigned to the so-called "sanitary cell" attached to the infirmary and located in one of the monastic chambers. It was much the same as the ordinary prison cell, and was closely guarded.

I shared the cell with an ailing woman prisoner named Natalia Trushina, who was suffering from pernicious anemia. She seemed to be in her middle forties. Actually, as I subsequently learned, she was much younger. There was something about her—perhaps her delicate, attractive features, or her sad eyes, or her simple and modest manner—that drew me to her, and I found her a pleasant companion. We exchanged the usual confidences. I told her about myself. And eventually I got from her this amazing story:

Her father was a minor civil servant in Leningrad, she an only pampered child. Despite their limited resources, her parents endeavored to give her a good education. But the death of both parents while she was still at the university left her without means to continue her studies. As she was alone, a neighboring family, the Alliluevs, took her to live with them; her father had frequently helped Alliluev when the latter was in trouble with the Czarist police on account of his activities as an underground Bolshevik.



The years 1918-1919 were difficult years in Leningrad. People were starving. Natalia considered herself very fortunate to have found a home with the Alliluevs, who were well off and highly placed in government positions so that they were well supplied with material comforts. Usually each day after breakfast, they all went to their respective jobs while Natalia remained at home to look after the household. Like one of the family, she had her own chores and responsibilities.

All went well so long as the federal government remained in Leningrad. But when the seat of government was transferred to Moscow, to the Kremlin, affairs took a different turn. There was a crisis in the Alliluev household. Alliluev himself had to go to the Ukraine on party business—and the younger daughter, Nadezhda or Nadya, who was employed in Lenin's secretariat, wanted to move to Moscow. The rest of the family, however, did not wish to leave Leningrad. The Alliluevs squabbled over the matter for a long time. Finally, it was decided to let Nadya go to the Kremlin, but on condition that Natalia accompany her.

"I was very attached to Nadya and gladly agreed to go with her as a sort of chaperone," Natalia told me. "I was to let her parents know if anything went wrong."

It was in 1919 that the two girls moved into the Kremlin. Nadya gave all of herself to her work, feeling honored to be the trusted secretary of "the great Lenin." As the one in charge of his confidential and coded correspondence, she inevitably became involved in the intricacies and complexities of the Kremlin. Frequently she had to work late into the night. On one occasion during the civil war she was sent to deliver personally Lenin's secret directives to the Soviet command at the Tsaritsyn front.

"I went with her to Tsaritsyn," Natalia said. "At that time

Stalin ran the show there. One evening, when he was somewhat tipsy, he made advances to Nadya. And when he returned from Tsaritsyn to the Kremlin, he started courting her. I decided to tell her family what was happening, but they at first attached no importance to it. Later when Kalinin, an old friend of the Alliluevs, warned them of the budding romance, they became alarmed. But by then Stalin had succeeded in turning Nadya's head."

At that time, a conflict was developing within the Kremlin between two opposing groups of Bolshevik leaders—one led by Trotsky, the other by Stalin. Nadya was fascinated with Stalin's political maneuverings. Stalin, in turn, was flattered by her interest in him, flattered not only because she was young and beautiful but also because of the key position she held in the administrative apparatus of the Kremlin. Nadya frequently helped him out by apprising him in advance of the contents of messages which she decoded for Lenin. Consequently, it was often possible for him to anticipate and block the moves planned against him by his adversaries.

Natalia could not share Nadya's elation over Stalin's triumphs. She also had serious misgivings about the role Nadya was playing in Stalin's intrigues. It was a little too like that of a gambler's accomplice. Moreover, her feminine instinct told her that Nadya's interest in Stalin's political game might easily lead to an interest in him personally. The game was an exciting one. The stakes were high. It was enough to make any young girl's head spin.

"There could, of course, be no question of true love between them," Natalia declared. "There was the disparity in their ages. He was twice as old as she, and most unattractive—pock-marked, swarthy, coarse-looking. And he was of a different nationality. Nadya, on the other hand, had developed

into a striking beauty. I can still see her as she looked then—graceful, gentle, rosy-checked, her complexion like the sky at sunrise. Nadya was a dream.”

And then, in 1920, what Natalia had feared came to pass.

One of Stalin's close friends, Lominadze, arrived in Moscow and brought with him several bottles of a rare Georgian wine, the Kakhetinsk wine. He decided to hold a party in Yenukidze's apartment. Just a handful of people were invited, among them Stalin and Nadya. None of Lenin's or Trotsky's friends.

At this party, Lominadze sang a song about a blossoming apple tree and the hurricane—how the hurricane fell ardently in love with the delicate apple tree, only to crush the tree in its passionate embrace. The ballad made a deep impression on Nadya who by then had had a few drinks too many. The party went on for hours. Nadya did not return home till morning, having surrendered her innocence to Stalin.

The news spread, and in time it reached the ears of Nadya's parents. “As a true Communist,” Natalia said, “Nadya's father had always upheld the principle of free love in a free socialist society. But in this case he reacted as any bourgeois father would.”

To placate the girl's parents, Stalin settled Nadya in his apartment, in a requisitioned house within the Kremlin walls. As “active creators of the new society” they did not deem further formalities necessary. During the first year of her “marriage,” Nadya continued at her job in Lenin's Secretariat, and kept abreast of all the doings at the Kremlin. But later on, because of her pregnancy and because the Secretariat itself was abolished (due to Lenin's illness), she was compelled to give up her post and with it all active participation in Kremlin affairs.

Then, according to Natalia, Nadya's position as Stalin's official wife began to reveal certain deficiencies. "First of all, Stalin turned out to be not quite the devoted and understanding husband Nadya had thought he was. Then there was the difference in their ages and backgrounds which led to bitter disagreements. Whatever one liked, the other disliked. Nadya was fond of sculpture, painting, music. Stalin was interested only in politics. Also, there were complications with the in-laws. Nadya's parents never became reconciled to her marrying Stalin. And Stalin's aged mother did not like 'that Russian girl.' "

As time went on, Nadya's lot became less and less enviable. An added factor was the tense atmosphere within the Kremlin following Lenin's death.

"But why should that have affected Nadya?" I asked. "Wasn't she virtually the mistress of the Kremlin?"

"She was no such thing," Natalia replied. "Nadya was a helpless creature, as much a slave of Stalin as I and the rest of the inhabitants of the Kremlin."

"Still I dare say that many of us in the political isolators would gladly change places with the slaves in the Kremlin," I observed.

"Maybe so. But the fact is that life in the Kremlin is no heaven on earth. I won't deny that we enjoyed all the material comforts. But we were deprived of the most precious rights—freedom of will, freedom of thought, freedom to be ourselves. We were not permitted to have any interests outside the interests of the Kremlin."

If the atmosphere was so oppressive, I wanted to know, why didn't these people leave the Kremlin?

"Because," she explained, "there are only two exits from the Kremlin—to the political isolator or to the next world. To

quit the Kremlin is tantamount to desertion. No one could leave voluntarily. We could not be trusted. We all knew too much. Take me, for example. Why am I imprisoned? Did I commit any crime? Did I steal anything? Did I kill anyone? Was I a spy? No. None of these things. I am in prison because I once lived in the Kremlin and know some of its secrets."

Now, as often happened in the period we were together, Natalia Trushina fell silent, apparently absorbed in her dark memories. At such times I tried not to disturb her, though I was eager to know the whole of her story. My own complaint was yielding to treatment and I expected soon to be returned to my cell. So I was always glad when Natalia emerged from her reverie and started talking again. Like all of us, she lived more in the past than in the present and it was correspondingly important. She could not doubt my interest. Also, there was in her mind the thought that I might someday be free and could use her knowledge to advantage.

She told me that Nadya, after Lenin's Secretariat was abolished, devoted herself to her household. At first, she continued to interest herself in the affairs of the Kremlin, but as time went on she became more and more detached from Stalin's intrigues. By then she had two children and gave herself entirely to them. As the children became older, Nadya developed an interest in journalism and worked for a while on the magazine *Revolution and Culture*. But there she soon discovered that she lacked sufficient training to hold any post of importance on the staff. So she turned to the study of music, then painting, and in time tired of both. It was Lenin's sister who suggested to Nadya that she acquire a formal education. The finest tutors were selected for her, and she easily passed the entrance examinations to the Industrial Academy.

"Nadya received good marks in the Academy," Natalia

said. "She proved to be a very diligent student. It was her way of trying to forget the emptiness of her personal life. She was looking forward to graduating with a degree in engineering—because she longed to do something constructive, and because it was a way to escape the stifling atmosphere of the Kremlin."

Nadya did not, however, graduate. None of her dreams was realized. Natalia Trushina could not conceal her emotion as she approached the tragic end of her story.

"My Nadya's fate was the fate of all the Kremlin wives whose husbands had cooled toward them. As I told you, she was never really in love with Stalin. True, there was a time when she was infatuated with him. But that wasn't love, rather a community of interests that they shared."

The rift between the couple, as Natalia looked back, came in 1927 when Nadya, defying Stalin, signed the Declaration of 121. By her act she violated the basic law of the Kremlin—unswerving loyalty to Stalin. Among others who put their names to the Declaration were Lenin's widow and sister, Madame Krupskaya and Madame Ulianova. In effect the three women were openly siding with such Opposition leaders as Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev. Stalin was furious and reprimanded them severely, demanding that they withdraw their signatures.

There was a heated quarrel. The women insisted on their right to express their opinions freely and to make their views known to the party and the country. But Stalin, losing his temper, banged on the table with his fist and finally brought them to terms. The women wept, then telephoned the newspapers not to publish their signatures under the Declaration.

It was at this critical period, Natalia said, that Nadya persuaded Stalin to permit her to study at the Industrial Academy.

## *Chapter* X X I I

SO NADYA ABANDONED THE KREMLIN AND ITS affairs and gave herself to her studies, while Natalia assumed almost entire care of the household and children. Stalin seemed pleased with the arrangement; with Nadya occupied, he did not have to suffer her demands and caprices. At times a full week would go by without the two seeing each other. When they did meet, the encounters were brief and hurried. Each lived his own life, engrossed in his own affairs. There was peace and quiet in the family.

However, the "court entourage at the Kremlin" (Natalia's words) felt that this relationship could not possibly be satisfactory to Stalin, that it created a vacuum in his life—a vacuum which ought to be filled. And with the solicitude typical of courtiers, they busied themselves to remedy the situation. In short, to find a replacement for Nadya.

The first to make the effort was the "ever obliging" Avel Yenukidze. He was eminently qualified for the task. As a patron of the arts, he was well acquainted with the people who made up the theatrical and cultural circles in Soviet Russia. He was determined to pick for Stalin the very best that these circles could offer, and after a painstaking survey of likely candidates his choice fell on a Moscow Komsomol

girl—an unusually beautiful young sportswoman named Zoya Nikitina.

At this point I interrupted Natalia. "Zoya Nikitina! Why, I have just met her aunt. She is here in this isolator. She traveled with me from Moscow. I understood her to say that Zoya paid with her life for an attempt to kill Stalin."

"That's true," Natalia said. "Actually, it was a case of two conflicting plans—Yenukidze's plan to get Zoya inside the Kremlin to groom her for the role of Stalin's new favorite; and Zoya's plan to get inside the Kremlin to kill Stalin. Both plans failed."

As I remember Natalia's account of the extraordinary affair, Yenukidze laid the ground deliberately and carefully. He aroused Stalin's interest with his glowing descriptions of Zoya's beauty. To Zoya he held out the promise of an important assignment—the rearrangement of the Kremlin library. Thus he lured Zoya to the Kremlin to display her to Stalin.

On the appointed day, Yenukidze drove Zoya to the Kremlin library. A little later, he brought Stalin there to "look her over." Stalin, however, did not go directly to that part of the library where Zoya was. He went, instead, to an adjacent room where there was a secret peephole through which he could observe her. He wanted to make sure that she was worth bothering with. Stalin studied her for a long time while Zoya, unaware, went on with her work—examining books, making notes.

"Zoya apparently appealed to Stalin," Natalia said, "but one thing aroused his suspicion. Why was she dressed like that? Women didn't wear capes in those days. What did she need a cape for? He ordered Zoya to be searched."

And beneath her cape was found a small pistol loaded with poison bullets.



"How was that possible?" I asked. "How did she get by the Kremlin guards?"

"The guards did not search her since she drove into the Kremlin with Yenukidze," was Natalia's answer.

"Then Zoya did go to the Kremlin with the intention of killing Stalin?"

"Certainly Stalin thought so, and I don't doubt that he was right."

"What about Zoya?" I said, having in mind what her aunt had told me. "How much is known about her?"

Natalia replied that she was known to be a confirmed terrorist. Ever since her schooldays she was being groomed by a White Guard organization abroad for the assassination of Stalin.

All that preparation—and then to be pounced on before her job was well begun. Not only that. Zoya's thwarted attempt to assassinate Stalin cost the lives of hundreds of people, chiefly members of the Komsomol and its leaders. "It also," Natalia added, "brought an end to Yenukidze's efforts to find a successor to Nadya."

As for Nadya herself, she was shocked to learn what was going on behind her back.

"Natashenka," she once said to Natalia, "I want to complete my studies as soon as possible and get out of here. I'm afraid to remain in the Kremlin!"

Some time prior to this episode with Zoya, a new figure had appeared on the Kremlin stage in the person of Roza, the sister of Lazar Kaganovich, member of the Politburo. Roza was a dashing brunette of about twenty-five, witty and sophisticated, so striking in looks that even Nadya seemed plain and unattractive by comparison. Whether of her own volition or at the behest of her brothers, she had turned her

charms on Stalin and conquered him completely. He was a frequent visitor at the Kaganoviches' home at Silver Pines in the summer of 1932.

All this Nadya knew, and the affair touched her deeply. It wasn't jealousy so much as a premonition that this was the beginning of the end. She made no effort to win Stalin back, or to challenge her rival in any way. She simply shut her eyes to everything but her studies and concentrated on graduating from the Industrial Academy as quickly as possible. Only one thing she asked of Stalin, that he behave himself discreetly, for it embarrassed her to show herself in public in the face of all the gossip.

There was a strained atmosphere in the Stalin home during these months. Even the two Stalin children—Vasya, who was then eleven, and Svetlana, who was nine—were aware of the new romance.

This was the situation when on the second day of the celebration commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution the Voroshilovs gave a big party in their Kremlin apartment. All the leading officials were there with their wives, including the Kaganoviches and Roza. Stalin went with Nadya. Natalia was home with the children.

About one o'clock at night, the doorbell rang at the Stalin apartment. Natalia ran to open it, thinking that it was early for the Stalins to be back. To her surprise, it was Nadya escorted by Voroshilov. In the vestibule, Nadya hastily thanked Voroshilov, bade him good night and rushed to her room. Voroshilov, looking rather nonplused, left after a moment, and Natalia hurried to Nadya who was sitting on the bed, staring blankly into space.

"It's the end," Nadya said. "I've reached the limit. Until now I've been a sort of wife to him, but not any more. I'm

nothing. The only prospect is death. I shall be poisoned or killed in some prearranged 'accident.' Where can I go? What can I do?"

Nadya became hysterical. Natalia tried to calm her, saying that Stalin's flirtations were well known to her, that he would tire of the present attraction as he had of others, and that she, Nadya, would soon be an engineer and free to go away and do as she liked.

When Nadya had quieted a bit, Natalia took her into the bathroom and she started to undress. Then, for no apparent reason, she fainted.

Natalia, alarmed, did the first thing she thought of. She grabbed the telephone and called the Voroshilov apartment and asked that Stalin return home at once. When he arrived a few minutes later, flustered and impatient, Natalia directed him to the bathroom. Nadya had regained consciousness by now but would not come out.

Through the partially opened door, Natalia heard the quarrel that followed. Nadya accused Stalin of carrying on shamelessly with "that woman" in the presence of a large company, of hurting her and humiliating her. Stalin, after listening in silence for a long while, answered her with a tirade. He told her that she had retained none of her old revolutionary ardor, that she had become transformed into a conventional housewife, that as far as the revolution was concerned she was just so much excess baggage. "You are no longer the companion needed by a leader of the world revolution!" he said.

The quarrel went on and on. Nadya out of her hurt pride argued like any woman who as wife and mother is conscious of certain rights. Stalin kept protesting that his position put

him above bourgeois concepts of morality, that he needed someone to rekindle his spirit, revive his will to leadership.

At this, Nadya was infuriated. "Roza, I suppose, revives you! . . . I know the kind of leader you are. More than anyone else, I know the kind of revolutionist you are!" And she went on to accuse him of usurping the leadership of the party dishonestly, of involving her in his shady schemes. She was, she said, ashamed to look her comrades in the eye because of his blood purges and liquidations. Her voice rose hysterically.

"Shut up, damn you!" Stalin roared at last.

Then Natalia heard a blow, a fall, someone gasping. Filled with foreboding, not quite knowing what she was up to, Natalia pushed open the door of the bathroom. There on the floor was Stalin savagely choking Nadya with both his hands and saying, "You would, would you!"

Natalia screamed, whereupon Stalin broke away from Nadya and with his face turned tore out of the bathroom.

Nadya lay on the floor, not breathing. At her temple was a large wound that could have been the blow from an instrument. There was blood, and near her on the floor was a blood-stained revolver.

Natalia carried her into the bedroom, bandaged her wound, and several times put her ear to her heart, but heard nothing. Then she rushed to the telephone to call a doctor. But at that moment Poskrebyshv appeared and forbade her to use the phone. He went into the bathroom first, hurriedly looked around, picked up the revolver, and ordered Natalia to clean up the bloodstains. After that he went to the bedroom, examined Nadya's wound, felt her lifeless pulse. He was about to join Stalin when Natalia stopped him.

"Shall I call a doctor?" she asked him. "Maybe it isn't too late," but knowing that it was.

"What sort of doctor? We don't need any doctors," he replied. "We'll do without them."

A few minutes later, Voroshilov burst in, breathless, his eyes bulging. Without saying a word, he rushed to see Stalin. Following him came Molotov, sleepy, disheveled. And, lastly, Yenukidze arrived, drunk, hardly aware of what was going on. They did not leave Stalin till morning. At their request, Natalia brought them liquor, valerian drops, soda water.

There was silence in the house except for occasional outcries from Stalin's study. Natalia stayed alone with Nadya's body. From time to time Poskrebyshev tiptoed into the room, then left. Grief and remorse racked her. Why had she summoned Stalin home? If she hadn't telephoned him, none of this would have happened. Nadya would still be alive. . . . She could not forgive herself.

Toward morning, Yenukidze—now sober—came to Nadya's bedroom and, affecting sympathy, asked Natalia for an account of what had happened. Though she did not trust him, she told him what she had seen and heard—only omitting some details of the quarrel.

Yenukidze listened attentively till she had finished, then said, "You, it seems, were the only witness to the tragedy. The children didn't hear anything? . . . Good. It is necessary, Natasha, that no one should know about this. Let Vasya and Svetlana think that their mother died naturally." He said more about the importance of secrecy, about the trust that was imposed on her. After that he asked her to help him with the corpse.

With water, scissors, comb, cold cream, and face powder they worked on Nadya's disfigured face, rearranging the hair to conceal the wound, striving for an appearance of normalcy. When they were through, Yenukidze suggested that she rest,

sleep for an hour or so. There would be a lot to do in the morning.

Natalia went to her room, threw herself on the bed, but couldn't sleep. When Yenukidze came to call her a couple of hours later, he reproached her for not taking hold of herself. "It's not good, my dear. People will begin to suspect things." He proposed a change of environment—a few days' rest in some quiet spot. And best go before the children were up. They were to be sent at once to Silver Pines. "Be ready in five minutes," he said, "and I'll bring the car around. Take things to last you for two or three days and later I'll bring you anything you need."

So Natalia gathered up some of her belongings, threw them into a bag, and left the house. It was still dark outdoors. Yenukidze accompanied her to the gate where there were two cars, a passenger car and a truck, and assisted her into the passenger car alongside an officer of the Kremlin Guards. Cordially he bade her good-by, and the two cars drove out of Kremlin gate. Natalia never saw the Kremlin again.

She was taken, by car and train, always under guard, to the Suzdal Monastery. There she was given a large sunny room—or cell—where she lived cut off from everyone and cared for by four deaf mutes. She was fed well and she was permitted to wear her own clothes.

Yenukidze came to see her after a couple of weeks, bringing warm clothes, undergarments, candy. He spent considerable time with her, chatting, giving her news of the children. She would have to stay at Suzdal a short while longer, he told her, until "things blew over." He commended her for her admirable behavior. "We have gotten good reports about you," he said. "Keep it up. The government and the party

appreciate what you are doing. In due time, you will be given a house to yourself and a generous pension."

After that visit, by Yenukidze's order, she was supplied with a newspaper regularly, and was permitted to select any books she wanted from the monastery library. Eventually, she read all the books they had, from cover to cover. Some of the books she reread several times, memorizing long passages which she would recite to herself.

"From day to day I awaited my release," Natalia told me. "But year after year passed, no one ever came to see me. Yenukidze, too, seemingly forgot me. Then I learned that he himself had fallen out of favor. This was a blow. With Yenukidze deposed, I lost all hope of regaining my freedom."

## *Chapter* X X I I I

TWO MONTHS WENT BY UNEVENTFULLY AFTER this experience in the prison hospital with Natalia Trushina. Then at the end of the summer, orders came for my transfer to another political isolator. No explanation was given.

This time I had to make the trip wearing prison garments, since my own clothes had been destroyed in the fire. In addition to what I ordinarily wore in the cell, I was issued a flannel robe. And in that attire I made the journey.

A torrential rain broke over my head as I was entering the Black Maria. The police van was divided by an iron screen into two sections—the front section was for the prisoners, and the somewhat smaller, rear section was for the guards. Out of the semidarkness a woman's voice greeted me warmly. Looking closely, I recognized the old lady Nikitina with whom I had made the trip from Moscow to Suzdal a few months earlier. My delight at meeting her again was not unmingled with the fear that perhaps I was being coupled with her in some new case concocted by the NKVD.

I was followed into the van by three men who looked as if they had been pulled out of a train wreck. They were filthy and scarred and bent over with pain. At the guards' direction



they took a seat on the bench opposite Nikitina and me, and the screen door was slammed shut.

We rode slowly over a rough road, pitching from side to side while the rain beat down. After an hour of bumpy riding, the van keeled over to the left, struck something, and stopped. An old wooden bridge we were crossing had collapsed under the weight of our car and we were stuck in a water-filled ditch.

The senior guard crawled out and went to summon another car. The other guards lit up their cigarettes and prepared to wait with us.

One of the men prisoners left his place and sat down beside me. Where, he asked in an anxious whisper, did I think we were being taken?

I guessed that it might be to Vladimir, judging by the distance we had covered and the direction we were moving in. Then I asked him, in turn, which case he was involved in—always the first question when prisoners met.

He said the case of the so-called Right Deviationists and Trotskyists. To my question as to the charges against him, he answered, "All sorts of things, including the assassination of Kirov."

"Then you are a codefendant of mine!" I said. "Excuse me, but who are you?"

He said he was Avel Yenukidze, formerly Secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. I could hardly believe my ears.

"You here! I don't understand. I never heard that you were involved in it."

He wanted to know my name. When I told him, he said, "Oh, yes. I remember. You are the notorious White Guard woman. Are you being linked with the Trotskyists and Right Deviationists?"

"No . . . that is, not that I know of. They have never accused me of that."

"Well, I have a feeling that you are," said Yenukidze. "Things are becoming more and more complex."

What did he mean by this? Was I being taken to Moscow for a review of my case now that it seemed new evidence had been uncovered and new people implicated? My hopes rose. But when I whispered my thoughts to Yenukidze, he shook his head. He knew of nothing good to report. If anything affairs had taken a turn for the worse. Prosecutor Vishinsky had succeeded in exacting a confession from Yagoda, the former Chief of the OGPU, to the effect that Kirov was assassinated by Nikolayev on orders from the Rightist-Trotskyist Bloc.

It was not easy to carry on a conversation within hearing of the guards. We had to keep our voices to a low whisper, which was difficult against the clatter of the rain. Yet in the time that we waited for the relief car to come, Yenukidze and I did talk at length. As I think back on it now, he spoke with surprising frankness. But I had grown accustomed to people pouring out their hearts to me on brief acquaintance. Our shared misfortune drew us together; it had the effect of erasing normal reticences, wiping out the lesser fears which are a barrier to communication.

I shall not attempt to recall Yenukidze's precise words. I cannot say for certain that he mentioned the name of Stalin. But very definitely he gave me to understand that Stalin—not the Rightist-Trotskyist Bloc or any other faction of the Opposition—had given the order which brought about Kirov's death. It was Yenukidze who was charged with telling Yagoda that the removal of Kirov was desired.

This piece of information stunned and confused me. If it

was true, then much that I had previously believed was not true. I expressed some of my disbelief to Yenukidze.

"But Nikolayev killed Kirov to settle a personal grudge. That is well known."

Yenukidze's reply was a disdainful smile.

Nikitina fetched from her pocket a small chunk of bread, broke it into tiny pieces, and offered them to all of us, saying: "Won't you join me?" When we refused politely, she started to eat by herself, her toothless mouth working over the morsels of bread. After a while, she leaned back in her seat and drowsed.

Yenukidze told me what I knew before—that the friendship between Stalin and Kirov reached the breaking point during the Seventeenth Congress of the party, when Kirov was given a tremendous ovation and in the secret balloting for membership in the Central Committee received a larger vote than Stalin himself. It was then that his doom was sealed. As for Yagoda, he had his own reasons for wanting Kirov out of the way. The original plan had been to bring Kirov to the Kremlin, but this plan was balked by Kirov's reluctance to leave Leningrad.

It was at this point that Nikolayev turned up in the office of Zaporozhets, Yagoda's lieutenant in the Leningrad NKVD. Zaporozhets was quick to realize that Nikolayev, offended and humiliated by Kirov, might prove useful, and without too much difficulty he got the approval of his superiors: Nikolayev was to be assigned the role of Kirov's assassin.

First, however, Zaporozhets took elaborate pains to fan Nikolayev's hatred of Kirov. Time and again he told Nikolayev of some job that was available—with a trade union, the *Komsomol*, an educational institution, an industrial plant. Then while Nikolayev was on his way to an interview, Zaporozhets

would call the man he was to see and warn him that under no circumstances was Nikolayev to be hired. When Nikolayev returned raging at the cool reception he had had, Zaporozhets would pretend a telephone call to check the reasons for the turndown. And each time he would report to Nikolayev that "Kirov had objected." Understandably, Nikolayev was in a fury. And while this was going on, he was quietly supplied with terrorist literature. Finally, a gun was slipped into his hands and the place, day, and hour were set for the attempt on Kirov's life.

What was I to believe? I had been so sure that I understood Nikolayev's reasons for killing Kirov. Now, in the light of Yenukidze's revelations those reasons seemed trivial. Yet I could not at once accept the implication that Nikolayev had been merely an unwitting tool of Stalin and his henchmen.

"If Nikolayev had not fallen under the influence of the Social Revolutionaries," I suggested, "if he had not been exposed to their terrorist literature, I doubt that Zaporozhets could have persuaded him to sacrifice his life in order to destroy Kirov."

"The Social Revolutionaries? Yes, I'll grant you that they played their part," Yenukidze agreed. "It was for that Zaporozhets sent Nikolayev to see them in Pudozh."

I protested that Nikolayev went to Pudozh to visit his aunt, not to see the Social Revolutionaries. But Yenukidze's reply was: "That's what Nikolayev thought. Zaporozhets had other ideas, and they worked out just as he intended."

As if he guessed my thoughts, Yenukidze remarked, "You may think it strange that I tell you all this, but I intend to make the facts public at the trial of the Rightist-Trotskyist Bloc.\* The truth must be believed."

\* Yenukidze did not appear in the trial of the Rightist-Trotskyist Bloc.

This was the hope by which I lived, that the truth eventually must triumph. My mind was full of questions and doubts, but I wanted the comfort that Yenukidze's words gave me.

It grew tiresome sitting in the van. The rain continued, the old woman slept on. Was she, by any chance, Nikolayev's aunt? Yenukidze asked me. When I said No, that she was Zoya Nikitina's aunt, he became very excited, exclaiming in such a loud voice that the guards bestirred themselves and called to us to shut up. More time passed.

At last a relief car came and tried to pull us out of the ditch. When several attempts had failed it was decided to transfer us to the other vehicle.

The Black Maria was unlocked. "Come out singly," a guard ordered. "You, Fatty, come first," he said, pointing to Yenukidze.

We continued our journey. This time Yenukidze sat in a remote corner of the van, in whispered conversation with Nikitina who was beside him. I felt very tired, as one does after a powerful emotional experience. But it was a sweet tiredness too, for hope was in me like a refrain: *The Kirov case is being reviewed after all. The chances of my being released are better than ever. They probably won't even call on me to testify at the trial if I continue to resist signing any self-incriminating documents.*

In an hour and a half we were at the Vladimir station, and a half-hour later inside a railway carriage bound for Moscow.

Upon arrival in Moscow, I was separated from my traveling companions and was transferred to a prison train. I, alone, occupied the compartment reserved for women. This journey to the east lasted about ten days. Then we were loaded into Black Marias and driven for another half day over bumpy

macadam roads to a huge three-story building standing in a semiwilderness. A sign over the entrance door bore the legend:

THE UPPER-URALSK POLITICAL ISOLATOR OF THE NKVD

There was a cool touch of autumn in the air, very welcome after the stuffy, tobacco-filled air of the train and police van.

## *Chapter* XXIV

THE PROCEDURE OF ADMITTING NEWCOMERS—the checking of documents, the inspection of belongings, the visit to the bathhouse—was carried out here with a deliberate slowness as if to stress the importance of the operation. Perhaps two hours passed before I was finally led into the inner isolator and locked in Cell No. 8, on the first floor.

It was a solitary cell, high, narrow, and long, furnished with the ten standard objects: a table, a stool, a bed, a chamber pot, a mattress, a pillow, a towel, a fine comb, a small cake of soap (about twenty-five grams), and the inevitable cardboard on the wall listing the rules and regulations. My apparel also consisted of four standard articles—a night shirt, a robe, a pair of stockings, and a pair of wooden-soled shoes.

After I had settled myself, I tried to establish contact with my neighbors. I knocked on the wall to the right. No response—a dead silence. The fear of being isolated seized me and I threw myself to the opposite wall. There I got a prompt response. Thank God, I was not alone!

A few days later, the cell to my right also took on life. In it was placed a noisy, emotionally disturbed man. Nearly every night he was dragged away somewhere and would not be returned to the cell till the early hours of the morning. The clang of the lock to his cell door would waken me and for a

long time thereafter I would not be able to go back to sleep, especially on the occasions when my neighbor's return was accompanied by agonizing shrieks.

At one time, the cell remained vacant for three consecutive days. Then before dawn, on the fourth day, loud screams echoed through our corridor. A man, apparently held down by others, was yelling hysterically. "I am Beloborodov. Pass the word on to the General Committee that I am being tortured!"

It was impossible to make out the rest of what he was saying. Presently, the door to his cell was banged shut. I rushed to the wall and tapped on it to inquire what had happened. But to my great disappointment Beloborodov did not know the prison code.

It was from my neighbor to the left that I learned that Beloborodov was one of the men in charge of the execution of the last Russian Emperor, Nicholas II. In recent years, he had fallen into disfavor because of his Trotskyist leanings. He had been assigned for a while to the North Caucasus to work in the peasant co-operative. Later he took an active part in the campaign to exterminate the kulaks in the Don and Kuban regions.

"At present," said my neighbor, "the NKVD is trying to involve Beloborodov in the alleged Rightist-Trotskyist plot. This may not prove too difficult. Beloborodov has quite a flair for fiction. I understand that he has written an extensive—and highly imaginative—tale about his connections with Bukharin, Yagoda, Bluecher. The NKVD is pressing him to admit that he also had ties abroad. But Beloborodov refuses. A few days ago they put him through the conveyor. How he managed to survive the treatment I don't know. Probably he has agreed to do some more fiction writing."

Soon after that both of my neighbors were removed from



their cells. And I remained for a long while alone, cut off from all outside contacts.

It was a chilly dismal day in February, 1938. After dinner, the inspector came into my cell and curtly ordered me to turn in my nightshirt and stockings. Assuming that this was some sort of routine check-up, I unprotestingly submitted. Then, after I had given him the stockings and shirt, the inspector ordered me to leave the cell. Dressed only in my robe and shoes, I went into the corridor where two guards were waiting for me. Firmly they took hold of me and proceeded to pull me toward the door leading to the cellar.

Filled with fright now, I resisted and screamed, "Where are you taking me? I shan't go there. Let me go!"

The guards ignored my protests.

It was cold and damp in the cellar. The few scattered low-powered electric bulbs cast but a dim light over the vast area. On both sides of the long central corridor were jerry-built wooden cells, like cages, with a lock on each door. I was thrown into one of these cells—Cell No. 68.

"Why am I being punished?" I demanded. "Why?"

"Stop whining," one of the guards said. "Everyone is being transferred to a punitive cell." When I pressed him for the reason, he grudgingly explained that it had something to do with the political trials that were going on at the time.\*

The place was unbearable, about five yards long and two yards wide, with a floor of earth. A chamber pot and some wooden planks to sleep on were the only furnishings. I looked through the cracks of the side walls into the neighboring cells. There was no one to my left. The other, No. 67, was occupied by a woman who told me that she was Lydia Pakis, a Com-

\* The Trial of the Rightist-Trotskyist Bloc, March 2-13, 1938.

munist of Finnish extraction, and that she had been in prison since January, 1935, in connection with the Kirov case.

Our conversation was interrupted by an altercation in the corridor. A woman with a non-Russian accent was screaming, "Where have you taken me? It's outrageous! Why, this is a pigstyl!"

"Stop acting so superior. We are through pampering your kind. Get in there!"

"I shan't. I'm an old member of the Communist party. How dare you treat me like that?"

"Enough of your talk. This is no place for speeches." And with that the guard pushed the prisoner into cell No. 69.

My new neighbor was an attractive woman of about forty, a Latvian married to a Russian. Olga Petrova was her name, and she was a Trotskyist. I later learned that she was suffering from cancer of the breast and had been brought down here from the prison hospital.

More and more prisoners were being dragged to the cellar—at first, women; and then, men.

"This is like some grim fairy tale," observed my neighbor in Cell 67. "It's like the story of the subterranean kingdom, where dark, evil forces reigned. One never hears a human word except 'Get in there!'"

As each prisoner arrived, his or her name soon became known to the rest of us. Word was spread in whispers from cell to cell, in both directions, through the cracks in the boarded walls. Friend discovered friend. There were half-whispered greetings, exclamations of surprise.

The corridor was gradually being filled with guards attired in warm military jackets and high felt boots. They were stationed at every other cell and were changed at two-hour intervals.

For "dinner" we were served a jug of warm water—and nothing else. Then the chief of the guards bellowed the command, "To bed, all of you!" This touched off a fierce clamor. There were loud, indignant protests.

"Call the chief of the isolator!"

"We demand human treatment. This is an outrage!"

Someone, I think it was Krylenko, the former commissar of justice, proposed, "I suggest a collective protest against this ruthless treatment of prisoners," and the proposal was supported by Beloborodov.

At once prisoners in all the cells began to shout and beat with their fists against the doors. The wooden walls and doors shook. In a frenzy, I kicked against the wooden boards. Suddenly a shot rang out in the corridor, then a second one, and a third.

The commotion subsided. In a booming voice, the chief of the guards announced: "Attention! This racket must stop at once. I have given orders to the guards to shoot anyone who disturbs the peace."

A few minutes later a prisoner, with his hands tied behind his back and a rag stuffed in his mouth, was shoved by armed guards past our cells to the exit. This had a depressing effect on all of us. The cellar quieted down. The same people who had protested so vociferously only a short while ago were now as cowed as any of the others.

"How am I going to sleep?" I asked the guard posted near my cell. "Couldn't I at least have a blanket?"

"You'll sleep all right," was his ready reply.

Fatigued, I lay down on the bare wooden boards, curled up like a ball, and covered myself with the robe. But the robe was much too short, and it was pitifully thin against the cold of the unheated cellar. All night I spent pulling it up around my

shoulders, then down over my feet when my legs rebelled at the curled-up position.

Around me I heard the other prisoners also tossing. My neighbor Lydia Pakis suffered perhaps the most. She had recently undergone an abdominal operation at The Crosses prison hospital. Without being given time to convalesce, she was transported here and en route the stitches had opened.

"The beasts," she groaned, "I told them . . . they're inhuman."

I tried to console her, or at least distract her. We talked of our lives in the past. She told me that she had been a Communist since 1917 and had taken part both in the Bolshevik uprising in Petrograd and later in the crushing of the Kronstadt mutiny. She had never belonged to an opposition group.

"I was arrested in December, 1934, accused of maintaining illegal connections with the Finnish Consulate."

"Then you probably know Anya, Leonid Nikolayev's sister?" I said.

"No, I don't know her," she replied, and went on to tell me how the NKVD had wanted her to admit that she had received money from the Finnish Consulate to pay Zaporozhets and Nikolayev. "I refused to admit any such thing. It was an utter fabrication."

I asked her if the NKVD had any evidence to back up the charge against her.

"No," she answered. "They never showed me anything concrete in the way of evidence against me. Still they keep me in prison."

My other neighbor, Olga Petrova, was quiet all night. I did not hear a sound from her cell.

The morning found me shivering from the cold and choked-

up with the foul-smelling air in the cellar. The guards were sneezing noisily. We were not taken out for our usual exercise. To air the cells, the outside door of the cellar was opened for a half-hour, and the chamber pots were emptied.

For breakfast, we were given a chunk of black bread, about one hundred grams, and a jug of lukewarm water. At noon, again a jug of water and about two hundred grams of bread. In the evening only water was served us. Ravenously, I ate the picce of bread that I had saved from the midday meal. Nothing in the world tastes quite so appetizing as the prison ration of black bread!

The next night Lydia Pakis spent in agonizing pain. She pleaded with the guards to call the doctor, to give her some sort of heater—or at least a warmer robe. She begged them, implored them, appealed to their sense of human decency. But they paid no attention.

On the third day her lifeless body was carried out of the cellar. "Well," the inspector remarked, "that's one 'counter' less."

The same day, another woman prisoner was brought into the cell vacated by Lydia, an elderly French woman who spoke a broken Russian.

"I was in a cell near the entrance," she said to me through the crack in the wall. "Too windy there. Much warmer here."

I tried to engage her in conversation but she could not understand. "I speak russe very poorly," she said. "Please talk louder. I can't hear well," she added.

I endeavored a few more times to exchange a word with her, but her deafness made communication between us impossible. For about ten days she prayed incessantly, on her

knees, with her back to the guards. And that's how she died, in a kneeling position.

Olga Petrova fought an eight-day battle with her cancer. She alternately prayed for forgiveness and cursed her tormentors. But neither her prayers nor her curses were heeded. On the eighth day, her body was carted away.

Her place in the cell was now taken by the old man Shliapnikov, a former leader of the Workers' Opposition, who was so weak that he hardly ever rose from the wooden boards on which he lay. Moreover, he had become almost completely deaf. It was, consequently, impossible for me to talk with him.

Shliapnikov did not last long. He passed away quietly, and seemingly without pain. He simply stiffened, grew cold, and stopped breathing. His neighbor on the other side, Krylenko, announced Shliapnikov's death to the inmates of the cellar, adding bitterly, "What an ignominious end to a great and outstanding person!"

One day we witnessed an unusual demonstration by the Chekists. At about ten in the morning, more than a hundred ardent young men appeared in the cellar decked out in shiny new uniforms, their chests covered with medals and decorations. Breaking up into groups of four, they proceeded to inspect our cells. When they came to my cell in due time, the guard opened the door wide for them. In they came, four resplendent figures, looking just alike and wearing the same contemptuous expression.

Without saying a word, they left my cell and went on to the next one. They were succeeded by another foursome. The same faces and general appearance, the same attitude. After

the second foursome came the third, then the fourth, and so on. I became tired of looking at them, and shut my eyes.

The prisoners were quiet for the most part during the demonstration. Only one or two protested: "Are we on exhibition here?" "What's the idea?" "Is this a zoo?" The young Chekists, however, were not disconcerted. They went about unperturbed, disdainful, superior, and in majestic silence.

The ritual lasted more than an hour, I would guess. Finally, the last foursome quit my cell and the guard locked the door. In the three years I had spent in political isolators, I had never witnessed anything of this sort before. Was it a harbinger of something new? A change in the Soviet system of political isolation?

With the departure of the parading Chekists, the cellar came to life again, and in the hubbub that ensued many indignant voices were raised.

"There, my dear comrades, is the fruit of our proletarian revolution," observed one prisoner.

And another: "What a performance! A ceremonial of Stalinist robots!"

By the first week of March, barely half of the original number of prisoners in the cellar were still alive. Only the young and those with strong constitutions had survived. The old and the ailing had perished, without solace, with empty souls and blank, dumbfounded expressions in their sunken eyes.

Thereafter I lost track of time. I sat motionless for hours on the wooden boards, with my knees pulled up under my chin. All my senses were dulled. Neither cold nor hunger tormented me any longer. I had become numb, indifferent to everything. What was the use? Nothing mattered.

I seemed to hear voices from a distant world, the names

of prisoners who had perished, evocations of forgotten scenes . . . Beloborodov . . . a lush, green meadow . . . fragrant wild flowers . . . a cool mountain stream . . . white sand, sea shells.

What do these people want?

The southern shore of the Crimea, with a warm breeze from the sea . . . magnolias, roses . . . Krylenko. A white sailboat is heading toward me, closer . . . closer. Misha is on it, he is waving to me . . . he is calling me. I see him . . . he knows I'm waiting for him. I feel happy, I am singing a joyous song, a song I never sang before. I am home with my husband, we are carefree, nothing troubles us, I am loved by everyone. The sun is caressing me . . . I must try to sleep, forget myself in slumber.

Why did the guard come in? What is he saying? Why am I being placed on a stretcher? . . .

I was conscious of a cold chill down my spine, a light hurting my eyes, and a man in white bending over me.

"Give her tea and rum," he ordered. "Open your mouth."

Could he really be talking to me? Why? What for? I needed nothing, only to be left alone. But I was not left alone. The man in white returned. I tried to open my eyes; they would not stay open. I swallowed the milk offered me and felt the sensation pleasant . . . then bouillon and toast. How good it tasted, like the bouillon Mother used to make only more delicious. . . .

In a few days, I was able to move my hands, my toes a bit. I felt very drowsy, but was afraid to fall asleep. Something was telling me, "If you do, you'll not wake up again."

A woman's voice urged me to "Shut your eyes and sleep a while." When I explained that I would die if I let go, she said,



"No you won't. You've pulled through. Do try to sleep, I'll stand by with the injection. Should anything happen, I'll give you a needle."

After that, I slept and woke, and slept again. Eventually I became aware of the hospital ward, of people coming and going, of men's voices.

"We must try to save the remaining prisoners or we'll have to close up shop. There'll be no one left to guard," someone said.

"There are plenty of them left and more are coming," was the reply. "Tonight seven are being brought in."

I was eating ravenously, and with every mouthful my spirits rose. My body was coming back to life, until by the middle of April I felt strong enough to get out of bed and pace up and down. At the end of the month, on a bright, sunny day, I ventured to go out for a walk.

To find myself in the courtyard of the isolator, able to breathe fresh air for the first time in two and a half months, seemed like the grandest luxury. It made me feel dizzy and somewhat weak in my knees. I sat down for a while, and when the guard paid no attention I stretched out on the ground and looked up into the blueness of the sky. Oh, how wonderful to be alive!

Our isolator was ominously silent these days. The prisoners who had survived the punitive ordeal were slowly recovering as I was. There was hardly any tapping of messages. All were too weary and too demoralized.

I resumed now my old routine of "psychological self-preservation" taught me by Orlovsky. I worked out a daily schedule of activities and adhered to it religiously. The summer went by uneventfully. There was the outside world of the

isolator, and the inner world in which I dwelt alone. I tried to keep the worlds separate.

Near the end of 1938, the isolator came suddenly to life. A large group of prisoners arrived—a well-fed, boisterous, and talkative lot. Three of the women shared my cell for a while. The first one, a self-assured young woman, did not stay long enough for me to learn much about her, but another who arrived was very communicative, full of airs and social graces.

"Forgive me for barging in and disturbing your after-dinner rest," she joked. "Believe me, I'm not here from choice."

"I understand," I assured her. "What can we do? We're all guests—sort of non-paying guests."

"Have you been here long," she wanted to know, "or are you part of our company?"

I asked her what she meant by her company.

"I mean . . . are you involved in the wrecking activities inside the NKVD, or were you sentenced for some other reason?"

I was perplexed for a moment. Not knowing myself why I was there, it seemed briefly possible that my imprisonment could have had something to do with sabotage within the NKVD. "Maybe. I don't know. I'm here in connection with the Kirov assassination," I answered her.

"Then you're not here because of any wrongdoing in the NKVD," she declared. "The Kirov affair was handled beautifully. There were no complaints about that job. We were all praised and given many awards. Nikolai Ivanovich was the knight in shining armor, of course."

"Nikolai Ivanovich?"

"Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov," she explained. "Aren't you a Chekist?"

"Quite the contrary," I said. "I'm a White Guardist."

"Oh." Her tone changed. "I was under the impression that only former top officials of the NKVD were detained in this isolator."

While I was telling her that the impression was false I listened to a message being tapped on the wall by a neighbor: "Exercise utmost caution. . . . A queer group has arrived. . . . Do not engage in any confidential conversations with them. . . . Pass the word on. . . . Zeitlin."

The woman also had heard the tapping.

"Do you understand the code? Could you teach it to me? What was the message—or is it a secret?"

Evasively, I told her that it was nothing important, merely information that a new group of prisoners had arrived.

"Probably our group," she said, then added, "I'll let you in on a secret. We're not here to serve out any sentence. We're not really prisoners. You see, our group consists of responsible officials of the Federal Commissariat of Internal Affairs. We're here at the orders of the new commissar, Comrade Beria."

This was news. "What happened to Yezhov?" I inquired. "What did they do to him?"

Nothing had been done to him, the woman informed me indignantly. He was very ill, suffering from tuberculosis. Then she went on to tell me that Commissar Beria had decided to subject the entire Chekist personnel to "this unique ordeal," to see whether they really were Chekist material or merely a "bunch of self-seeking, weak-kneed Philistines." The ordeal, she was sure, would last only two or three months. On February 24, the anniversary of the Cheka, those who had borne up courageously under the rigors of imprisonment would be returned to their posts. The others, who did not

make the grade, would be thrown out of the ranks, discarded as so much rubbish. "We are being submitted to a test, because too many alien elements had infiltrated our ranks," was the way she put it.

"I see. You said that your colleagues who pass the test will be returned to their posts by February 24. But you didn't say what year."

"Naturally, 1939," she said, but without much conviction.

"Well—blessed are those who believe," was all I could think to reply.

With that our conversation ended. The woman was transferred from my cell later that day and another was brought in to spend the night. A mattress was thrown on the floor for her, and as this took up all the free space in the cell, we had either to stand or lie down. There was no room to move around.

This woman, also a Chekist, was about forty years old—good-looking, dark-complexioned, and very talkative. She told me that she came of a working-class family in Leningrad, and had graduated from the Gymnasium. During the civil war she served with the Red Army on the northern and southern fronts. After the war, she resumed her studies, completed a university course in Leningrad, and was engaged by the OGPU. In 1936, she was transferred to Moscow and assigned to the foreign sector of the NKVD.

"What fascinating work that was!" she exclaimed. "And what opportunities it offered. Twice I was sent on missions abroad. I was given unlimited money to spend. . . . But what's the use? Why talk about it? It's all gone now."

"But you're here just for a couple of months," I reminded her, "for a sort of a test. Then you'll be returned to your post."

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

"That's what I heard."

"Oh, it's only talk," she said in a dejected voice. "Personally, I don't believe it."

Zeitlin tapped on the wall: "Be careful. They'll betray you. Good night."

"Good night," I tapped back.

"Are you able to decipher these messages by ear? How clever of you," my cellmate remarked. "I missed the first couple of words. . . . You don't need to worry about me. I shan't betray you. Not all the Yezhovites are stoolpigeons."

We lay silent for a while, and then fell asleep.

In the morning, shortly after the exercise walk, the woman was taken to another cell. Zeitlin, too, was removed from his cell. To my desperate tapping, there was no response from either of the adjoining cells. Was this merely a coincidence? Or was it the handiwork of the zealous newcomers who were undergoing a test of faith?

How those Chekist women fared, I never found out. Did they pass the ordeal with flying colors? Were they permitted to resume their fascinating work? Or were they still being tested?

I remained alone after this for a long period of time. The isolator, meantime, returned to normal. Its old routine, disrupted for a while by the arrival of the fresh contingent of prisoners, was restored again. January and February passed, then the rest of the winter. Only one thing happened worth noting. There was a complete turnover in the administrative personnel. They were replaced by meticulously attired, stern-looking, efficient automatons, similar to the type I had encountered at Solovetsk.

## *Chapter* X X V

IN THE SPRING OF 1939 MY "PRIVACY" WAS DISRUPTED by the admission to my cell of a woman who seemed to be about sixty-five years old and was for some reason vaguely familiar. She was tall and lean, with an ugly, wrinkled, and weather-beaten face. She had bags under her eyes and closely cropped hair. Possibly because she spoke in a deep, hoarse, mannish voice, there was something spinsterish about her.

I must have shown my displeasure when she moved into my cell, for she said consolingly, "I shall be with you just a short time. I've become frightened of being alone and I'm having all sorts of hallucinations. Apparently, my nerves are not what they should be. The doctor said that it is necessary for me to have someone to talk with or I'll crack up."

She proved to be very loquacious, no doubt because she had been in solitary so long. She told me right off that she was an old Bolshevik, an old Chekist, and a former commander of a Red Guard cavalry troop. During the civil war, she was awarded three Red Banner decorations, and later for her work in the Chkka she received the order of the "merited Chekist." She had been arrested and brought to this isolator the previous autumn after Yezhov's downfall because of the alleged "wrecking activities" within the NKVD. Her Chekist

colleagues assured her that she was being held in detention merely to test her zeal.

To make her feel better, I remarked that since she had rendered such distinguished service to the Soviet government, she probably would not be kept in the isolator long.

Her faded eyes lit up with hope. "I think so, too," she said. "I can't possibly believe that this is to be my destiny after all the work I have done in behalf of the revolution. Still, I don't understand why I'm being held at all. Is it really to test me? What nonsense. I've been a Chekist for twenty years. Imagine, twenty years! And you," she asked, "what case are you involved in?"

I told her.

"Oh, yes, I remember the Kirov case well," she said. "A grand case. I might say, a world-shaking case. Many people paid for it with their necks, among them a large number of Communists. Yes, the Kirov affair took even a sizable toll of Chekists. . . . One of my colleagues, by the way, wound up in a political isolator. Perhaps you've run into her—Katya Rogacheva?"

I said that I had, and explained that Katya had married the Social Revolutionary Lukyanchikov while in the Chelyabinsk Isolator.

The woman expressed surprise not unmixed, I thought, with admiration. "Katya married again? What a she-devil! How did she manage it?"

With half my mind I had been struggling to remember where I had seen this woman before. Now it came to me. "Excuse me," I said, "aren't you the NKVD official who came to say good-by to Katya in the Leningrad prison?"

"Why, yes," she answered. "I'm Mirova. Katya and I are old friends. She and I belonged for many years to the same

party organization in Leningrad. In fact, she was my party superior in the Regional Committee."

"You have changed so much. You look so different. I hardly recognize you," I said, putting it as gently as I could.

Mirova had staged a noisy scene when she was first brought into my cell. She had had a heated argument with the inspector, demanding a bed instead of the straw mattress provided for her. Later in the evening she begged me to change places with her, saying that she couldn't sleep on the floor because of her rheumatism. She was so pathetic that I hadn't the heart to refuse, though my own health was none too good.

We were hardly settled for the night when she launched into a long monologue. She reminisced about her youth, about the part she had played in the revolution, and spoke nostalgically of the civil war period. "I gave a good accounting of myself in those days," she declared. "The cavalry troop I commanded will long be remembered. The Whites feared me like the plague. My cavalry raids made history. . . . Oh," she sighed, "those were gay, heroic days! Life was exciting and meaningful!"

Then she told me of her love affair—"the one and only." It was in 1918, on the southern front. He was a Cossack captain, a commander of a White Guard detachment, a handsome, dashing fellow. She took him prisoner, near the village of Olginsk.

"I liked the son-of-a-bitch from the moment I set eyes on him. He excited me—I can't tell you how hard I fell for him. I gave myself to him wholeheartedly. And what do you suppose happened? The bastard took advantage of my womanly weakness and at the first opportunity fled from me."

According to Mirova, she promptly took off with her cavalry troop in pursuit of the fleeing lover, and turned the country-



side upside down. She tortured and executed prisoners left and right to find out where he had gone. But there was no trace of him. He had vanished completely. And because of him, her hatred for the enemy, "the damned Whites," became more inflamed.

"Of course, I've had many bedfellows since then," she informed me, "but no one ever roused in me the feeling I had for that White Guard bastard."

Later she joined the Cheka and did counterespionage work near the war zone. It was an opportunity to repay the Whites for what the Cossack captain had done to her. "With my own hand I shot them by the dozens. Whether guilty or not guilty, once they fell into my hands, they never got out alive."

I was curious to know how old she was at that time. Going on twenty-nine, she told me. Now she was forty-nine, nearing fifty.

My face must have revealed surprise for she added: "The life of a Chekist is not easy. We work mostly at night. It's intensive work, hard on the nerves. You have to deal with all sorts of people. Sometimes you get a soft submissive person, but more often they are hard and unyielding. Before you are finished with them, they have sapped all your strength."

She went on to say that few Chekists live out their days normally. Most of them either wind up in an insane asylum, commit suicide, or end in the cellar with a bullet in their head. No Chekist is permitted to quit the service voluntarily and transfer to other work.

"I aged chiefly in the last few years," she said. "It was the Kirov case that wore me out. It undermined the health of all of us."

The story she told me was one that I had heard before—

days and weeks without sleep, living mostly on vodka and tobacco.

"At times you'd start working on a case and you were embarrassed to look the accused in the eye. He'd be one of your kind. Still you had to convict him. So you'd take hold of yourself, brace yourself with a drink, and deal with the client firmly, in the Chekist manner. You'd press him until he gave in. To one you made promises, to another you made threats, and on a third you'd use a rubber club. Eventually, they all yielded—and off they'd go to join the queue to the cellar."

One of the men Mirova was assigned "to put through the mill," she told me, was a close friend of hers, a member of the Central Committee named Lobov. He had been a sort of Communist "godfather" to her, having sponsored her admission to the party. And in later years, whenever she had any difficulty with the party chiefs, Lobov would stand up for her and get her out of trouble.

An old-time Bolshevik underground worker, Lobov had fought in two revolutions. He was one of the organizers of the Komsomol and the founder of the Young Leninist Club in Leningrad. He was also a moving spirit in the Society of Old Bolsheviks. About a month after Kirov's assassination, when word reached him that many of his former protégés in the Young Leninist Club had been executed and that Old Bolsheviks were being rounded up and arrested, Lobov hurried to defend his friends. Calling a meeting of the Society of Old Bolsheviks, he introduced a resolution demanding that a stop be put to the intraparty terror. His slogan, "Let's have no more bloodletting in the party!" swept Leningrad and became the fighting motto of factory workers and the university students.

"Understandably, this couldn't go on," Mirova said. "On

Stalin's orders, Lobov was hastily nabbed by the NKVD and his case was assigned to me."

Conscious of her obligation to Lobov for favors in the past, Mirova gave him what she regarded as good advice: "Comrade Lobov, you no doubt realize the fix you're in. You'd be lucky to draw only ten years in a political isolator. So let's make a deal. You confess that due to some misunderstanding you have behaved very badly and that now you wholeheartedly regret your actions. And I, in turn, will do all I can to lighten your punishment. For the sake of our old friendship, I shall try to get you off with a voluntary exile sentence, or at worst a couple of years' imprisonment. All you have to do is write out your confession."

But instead of accepting Mirova's proposal and thanking her for it—"after all, I was risking my job for him"—Lobov heaped every kind of insult on her, swearing at her for profaning party honor, betraying party traditions, and "all that sort of rot."

For several days Mirova struggled to make him see reason. According to the December 1, 1934 decree, investigations had to be completed within ten days, and Yezhov was getting impatient. She pressed hard on Lobov, but he continued to be abusive. At the final hearing he even dared to spit at her, for which she slapped him in the face. Then when he rose to his feet, maddened, and was about to strike her back, she pulled out her Browning and shot him.

"You mean you killed your old friend?" I exclaimed.

"Friend or no friend, a Chekist can't put up with such insults and humiliations."

When the incident was reported to Stalin, so she was told, he shrugged his shoulders and repeated one of his favorite sayings: "You can't make omelets without breaking eggs."

That first night Mirova talked for hours, until I was head-achy. Her stories haunted my sleep, acting as a sort of drug. In the morning, when the inspector entered the cell, I was still asleep, something that rarely happened, and he had to waken me in order to pick up the mattress I was lying on, place it with the other mattress, and fold both in the bed against the wall. My head still ached, the air was stuffy and breathing difficult. But Mirova seemed to be in fine spirits.

"I had a marvelous sleep," she said cheerily. "Just having someone to talk with has calmed my nerves. . . . I'm afraid you didn't sleep very well. I don't suppose it's too comfortable on the floor. Never mind, I'll ask the inspector to put a second bed in the cell for you."

Her solicitude annoyed me, and I was alarmed at the casual way in which she was taking over the cell. Was she planning to stay with me for a long time? After exercise, I explained to her that I maintained a strict routine, and would appreciate it if she occupied her time somehow and paid no attention to me.

"By all means," she said. "Go on doing whatever you wish. We can talk later. You know, I like you. I'm glad they put me in your cell."

I spent the early part of the day engaged in my activities, trying to be unaware of her presence. But after dinner, though I wanted to avoid further confidences, she began talking again—and nothing would stop her. Recalling that I was involved in the Kirov case, she asked if I wouldn't like to learn how it developed within the NKVD. Then without waiting for my response, she was off.

"It all started on a Saturday. We at the NKVD were having a little party. Our chief, Medved, was away on a hunting trip. There was drinking and much joking about the feud be-

tween Medved and Commissar Yagoda, in which Yagoda got the better of Medved. We all thought it very funny when someone remarked that the berry [the Russian word is *yagoda*] ate the bear [in Russian, *medved*]."

At this point Mirova interrupted herself to explain the witticism. Yagoda saw in Medved, who was a highly influential Chekist, a rival for his own job. The struggle between them approached a climax when a factory worker with a distinguished revolutionary record was executed by the Leningrad NKVD. Kirov, who had wanted to curb the powers of the NKVD, protested and finally took the matter to the Kremlin—with the result that Stalin ordered Yagoda to transfer Medved from Leningrad to a minor post in the provinces. This was just what Yagoda wanted, and he announced that Medved was to be sent to the Far East.

"To be sure," said Mirova, "Medved was not devoured until later. But he got into trouble after the Kirov assassination: he was one of those purged for 'failure to take the necessary precautions,' according to *Pravda*. But to get back to the party we had that Saturday. There we were dancing, listening to phonograph records, singing—having a wonderful time. Some of us were getting ready to leave—I had made a date with one of the boys to go to the circus—when suddenly the phone rang. It was Zaporozhets, saying that Kirov had been killed, Stalin was on his way to Leningrad, and the entire personnel of the NKVD was placed in a state of emergency. Oh! I thought, this is mighty serious. And sure enough, all hell broke loose."

First, the staff was set to work rounding up anyone who had the least connection with Nikolayev: his friends, relatives, acquaintances, regardless of their party status or rank; all persons listed in his address book, as well as people who at one time

or another had worked with him. Agents were brought in from various parts of the country to assist with the search.

Meantime, the Commissar of Internal Affairs, Yagoda, arrived in Leningrad from Moscow with new orders for implementing the decree of December 1. One called for the prompt disposal of all pending cases of antigovernment activity. Investigation of all suspects held in Leningrad prisons was to be concluded within twenty-four hours, and the prisons were to be emptied.

"Our prisons at the time," Mirova recalled, "were filled to the rafters with people charged with all sorts of counter-revolutionary activity. Some of them had been under detention for years. Their clothes were in shreds. We had planned to release a few of them and ship the rest to concentration camps. But there was always some delay."

Though the decree of December 1 applied only to those guilty of terrorist acts, Yagoda chose to invoke the law against all prisoners irrespective of the charges against them.

"In short, he ordered us to execute each and every one of them. There was to be no dilly-dallying. We had to get right down to work. At that time we did not have an electric chamber, so the cellar was reorganized on a more efficient basis. We selected a shock brigade of executioners under the command of Vitka Golubov. (He was one of my beaux.) Space was set aside for a kind of rest room and buffet for the brigade, supplied with liquor and food to fortify them and maintain their fighting spirit. I, myself, selected the refreshments. Even as I think of it, my mouth waters."

A system was worked out for delivering the prisoners to the cellar, Mirova explained. Beginning with the top floor, all the prisoners were driven from their cells into the corridor near the elevator and lined up in single file. "Enter the lift one at

a time," they were ordered. "No pushing. No crowding. Wait for your turn."

Mirova told with zest how she had instructed some of her men to walk along the line and casually drop such words as "bathhouse" and "release of prisoners." She knew from past experience that these words had an electrifying effect. Prisoners, ever hopeful, were only too willing to believe that they were being taken to the bathhouse prior to being released from jail.

"I had seen all kinds of sights in my life," she said, "but this was the first time I had ever seen people queuing up to be executed."

The operation was carried out in this way: The first prisoner entered the elevator, was carried to the cellar where he was received by Behemoth (the name given to the fat man who was in charge). Behemoth handed him over to a guard who escorted him to the other end of the room while the elevator meanwhile ascended for the second prisoner. As the first prisoner approached the last door in the cellar, Golubov fired a shot in the nape of his neck. The timing was so perfected that executions were at intervals of every two, two and a half minutes. "Like a conveyor system," Mirova said.

I was praying that Mirova would shut up, or at least spare me the sickening details. But she went on as if possessed, describing how each floor of the prison was emptied in this manner—of priests, a group of bishops, some dissident Communists and unruly Komsomol youths, men and women, the sick and the well. In the morning when she went down to the cellar to visit Golubov, the place was "in an awful mess," with dead bodies piled high and blood everywhere. Some of the bodies were stirring, groaning, for Golubov was nearsighted and had broken his spectacles during the night; after that his

aim was none too good and he wounded without killing. "But the important thing is that by morning—by the time Stalin arrived—we had succeeded in executing some two hundred people."

"Is that all?" I said.

Mirova, however, was immune to sarcasm. "You must realize that the procedure took time. It was impossible to work faster. Still we hadn't finished the job. To clean out the entire jail, four hundred more had to be liquidated. And for that we needed two more days."

The problem was solved by transferring the remaining prisoners to three cells (about a hundred to a hundred and fifty in each cell) and from there feeding them, one by one, to the cellar. This was done while Stalin was upstairs busy with the interrogations. It was, as Mirova said, "a neat job." But the prison was not emptied of its old tenants before it began to fill up again. As early as the night of December 2, those arrested in the Kirov case started to arrive, and they kept coming day after day for one and a half months. Prisoners came, others left—some to be liquidated, some to be shipped off by convoy to concentration camps.

"As a result of this operation, Leningrad was thoroughly cleansed," Mirova said.

"Cleansed?"

"Of course," she replied. "Figure it out for yourself. Three to four convoys every day for three months—each convoy consisting of eight hundred to one thousand persons . . ." On and on she went reciting statistics—the number of cars in a convoy, the days required to reach the various Siberian camps.

"You are very good with figures," I observed. "But yours is a dry arithmetic. You multiply convoys by prisons, prisons



by cars. Where is the human element? How do you calculate human suffering?"

"That's not our affair," was her answer to that. "What do you expect from us—poetry? We are Chekists, not poets or philosophers. It is sufficient for a Chekist to carry out his assigned tasks without inquiring into matters that do not concern him."

## *Chapter X X V I*

MIROVA WAS IRREPRESSIBLE. SHE WENT TO BED talking, and got up talking. On another spree of confidences she told me about Stalin's questioning of Nikolayev.

Informed of Kirov's assassination, Stalin telephoned the Leningrad NKVD a series of directives. From them it was understood that the utmost political significance was to attach to the affair. But one directive perturbed Chudov and Zaporozhets: Stalin wanted Nikolayev, who was lying at the Smolny on the point of death, transferred to the regional offices, and he ordered that all possible measures be taken to save Nikolayev's life and preserve his ability to speak. He, Stalin, was leaving immediately for Leningrad and expected to talk personally with Nikolayev.

The two NKVD officials were not happy about this, and for good reason. Zaporozhets had had various dealings with Nikolayev. As for Chudov, he was an old friend of Nikolayev. To have been associated with an assassin of a Politburo member was not a pleasant situation to be in. Zaporozhets and Chudov would have preferred not to have Nikolayev alive and able to talk with Stalin. But there was nothing they could do. Stalin's word was law.

So Chudov hastily gathered a number of physicians and

professors from the Sverdlov Hospital and the Military Medicine Academy, and gave Mirova responsibility for them.

"Lenka was brought from the Smolny to our NKVD offices," Mirova said. "He looked half gone. I thought to myself, He won't last till Stalin's arrival and I'll catch hell for it."

In her forthright way, she gave the specialists to understand the nature of the emergency and helped them transform her office into a surgery. Nikolayev was given blood transfusions, intravenous feeding, sedatives, tonics. He responded admirably and eventually he fell asleep. All was well.

And then at dawn on December 2, while the old prisoners were being liquidated and new prisoners were being admitted, Stalin burst in with his entourage—Poskrebyshev, Agranov, Yezhov, Kosyrev, Voroshilov. His first question was, "What condition is Nikolayev in? I must talk with that scoundrel immediately."

"Nikolayev is very weak," Mirova told him. "He's asleep now."

"Let's go to him," said Stalin to Poskrebyshev.

One of the physicians remarked that it was imperative for Nikolayev to rest till eight A.M. To this Stalin merely nodded, as if to say "that's all right," and went in to where Nikolayev was.

Nikolayev was asleep. But hearing footsteps, he opened his eyes.

"Greetings, Comrade Nikolayev," Stalin called to him. "I've come from Moscow to see you. How do you feel? Here, here, my friend. I don't understand it. How did you happen to do such a horrible thing?"

At this, Lenka rose in bed and exclaimed in a hoarse voice,

"Yes, I killed Kirov. I did it deliberately, for the highest considerations. I killed Kirov to save our party!"

Nikolayev spoke heatedly in a staccato manner, according to Mirova. He seemed determined to make it clear that the crime he had committed was not for personal reasons. Mirova thought that he was vastly impressed by the fact that Stalin himself had come to see him and that Stalin spoke with him so gently.

I said something about his being a pathetic creature forced to put on this final act, but Mirova said No—that it was his moment and he was making the most of it: the hero and martyr with the spotlight on him. For a while Stalin listened in silence while Lenka raved on about his "historic mission" to expose the degeneracy in the party; how he had been "victimized by the bureaucratic machine"; how the party had lost its comradely spirit—all because of Kirov. Whenever Nikoloyav broke into a coughing spell, Stalin would comfort him in a fatherly fashion and call the doctors to minister to him. Then Nikolayev would resume his oration.

Finally Stalin grew weary of Nikolayev's ravings and cut in with some direct questions. How, he wanted to know, was it Kirov's fault? Who were the bureaucrats he, Lenka, had in mind? At one point he cautioned Nikolayev against slandering Kirov now that he was dead and could not defend himself—unless the charges could be supported by facts.

"Facts you want? I have all the facts you need," Nikolayev said to this. "In the testament to my children I have given scores of facts. It is hidden in my sister's piano. Get it and read it. You'll find all the evidence there in detail."

At this point Nikolayev needed another injection. While the doctors worked over him, Stalin sent Agranov to get the testament.

In a little while Nikolayev revived. Stalin was beaming. The questioning went on—Stalin begging for more specific evidence, for names and facts, and flattering Nikolayev by telling him that “the eyes of the party are on you.” But Nikolayev could not or would not understand. He continued to talk in large generalities about his “sacrifice to check the spread of Kirovism,” about the betrayal of “those who had devoted their lives to the proletarian revolution.” Stalin tried every tack he could think of to get the information he wanted, and when Nikolayev showed signs of becoming faint he howled for the doctors “like a bear,” said Mirova, who added: “I would never have thought that Stalin could degrade himself like that. It was disgusting.”

Then at one point Stalin said to Nikolayev: “You must give me the names of party officials who have thwarted you.”

This touched a spring somewhere and Nikolayev became suddenly animated. Name after name rolled off of his tongue—the leading party members of Leningrad who had refused him assistance. Stalin listened, soaking it in, now and then suggesting a name Nikolayev hadn’t thought of. Chudov? Zaporozhets? Nikolayev hesitated about the latter, then declared that Zaporozhets was dishonest, an opportunist and careerist.

Stalin nodded, and inquired whether Zaporozhets had been arrested.

Yes, Agranov answered. Did Stalin want to see him?

“What for?” was Stalin’s reply. “There is nothing to discuss.”

When Poskrebyshev had taken down the last of the names, Stalin called for Nikolayev’s wife Milda. Another long conversation took place. Stalin professed to be disappointed that Milda, a good party member, had failed to give Nikolayev the

moral support he needed, which might have prevented the crime. Nikolayev protested that the degeneracy of the party, not his personal situation, was the root of the trouble. Milda defended herself by saying that she had no choice but to act as she did when the entire party organization had turned against her husband. Her own standing was in jeopardy, she said, because of the new course adopted in Leningrad.

"New course?" Stalin asked. "What new course? I haven't heard of a new course. You've made it up."

But Milda held her ground. The Zinovievites and Trotskyists, who were working together with Kirov for party reform, held all the chief posts in Leningrad, she reiterated. To keep in favor with them, and keep her job, she had had to break with Nikolayev and let it be thought that she did not approve of the general party line.

Stalin questioned her in detail, and in doing so showed an acute knowledge of her family affairs. One question in particular had dramatic consequences.

"If, as you say, all this was happening in Leningrad under Kirov's benevolent eye—why didn't you warn the Central Committee? Why wasn't I told about it?"

Milda answered him with some heat. "What do you mean you weren't informed? Lenka wrote to you twice about the disgraceful goings-on in the party. I helped him compose the complaints myself. The last one, written in August, listed all the Zinovievites Kirov had put in key posts."

Stalin became excited by this. What complaints? he wanted to know. Who had received them? And he sent Poskrebyshev rushing to the telephone to get a full report while he turned again to Nikolayev.

Who, he insisted upon knowing, had helped to carry out the assassination of Kirov?

The question, as Mirova recalled the incident, caught Nikolayev by surprise. He, in turn, became excited and angry-- apparently because of the suggestion that others were deserving of a share in his glory.

"I had no accomplices," he repeated over and over. "I am solely responsible. I am the one who uncovered the decadence within the party. I am the one who sacrificed my life. The plan and execution were mine." And so on and so on, to prove that he was a historic figure who had turned a new page in the record of the party.

Stalin pooh-poohed this and went on probing at wearisome length. Now he wanted to know whether anyone from Moscow had put Nikolayev up to the crime. Nikolayev said No, he knew no one in Moscow who had put him up to anything. At this Stalin expressed satisfaction.

"You say no one in Moscow or in the Kremlin is involved? That's good. Very good."

In the meantime Poskrebyshch had succeeded in making inquiries about Nikolayev's complaint. It had indeed been brought before the Central Committee a few days before and it was scheduled to be referred to Stalin the next day.

So that was that, Mirova ended her long story. Why the delay? And what if there had been no delay, if everything had gone through on schedule and the complaint had received prompt attention? Would this tragic event have been averted with its long train of consequences?

Stalin left Nikolayev's bedside after receiving the report. He had been with the dying man nearly three hours, according to Mirova. In that time Zaporozhets had rounded up the people Stalin wanted to question. And in that time Zaporozhets' own doom was sealed. Within an hour the order was

given that he was to be taken to the cellar and shot. Mirova herself summoned a detail of guards and delivered him to Golubov.

To me Mirova said jestingly, "Zaporozhets didn't have to wait in line. Golubov attended to him at once."



## *Chapter XXVII*

MIROVA TALKED SO MUCH THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE to follow attentively everything she said. I would listen for a period, then my attention would wander. I grew dizzy with the torrent of words, while she apparently found relief in these outpourings. Without doubt, she was unbalanced, in need of a psychologist. My memory could retain only a fraction of what she poured into my reluctant ears.

Most of Mirova's stories were extravaganzas of one sort or another—wild parties, reckless love-making, executions embellished with all the gruesome details. But from them a few facts and impressions stood out clear. Stalin played a considerable part in the investigations following Kirov's assassination, and his likes and dislikes were at all times a decisive factor. For instance, Stalin disliked and feared the Young Communist intellectuals led by Katalynov, whom he grilled in a long dramatic session.

I asked Mirova what, if anything, she knew about the weapon used in the killing. "Did they ever find out who gave Nikolayev the revolver?"

There was no mystery about it, Mirova replied. Everyone knew that the Nagan belonged to old man Avdeyev of the Society of Former Political Prisoners.

"But how?" I persisted.

Very simple. Zaporozhets and Avdeyev were neighbors and the two families often exchanged visits. Zaporozhets had his wife, a former Chekist herself, steal the revolver from the wall in Avdeyev's study. "That's all there was to it," Mirova said, laughing.

In all the events she described, Mirova herself played a conspicuous part. If one was to believe her, she was present when Stalin interrogated Katalynov; it was she who took down Yenukidze's deposition in which he accused Stalin of arranging the murders of Kirov, Lenin, Kuibishev, and Nadezhda Allilueva; it was she who delivered Zaporozhets to his doom; and she who proposed to Yezhov a plan for creating a military unit, an elite guard, of Chekists made up of young men emotionally and intellectually retarded, or, as she put it, "lads who were antisocial, mentally backward, and subhuman." Preferably, these boys would be without home ties and would therefore be immune to any pulls of affection. It was her thought that they should be given special training and assigned for life to the political isolators where prisoners too would be held for life.

Usually I listened in silence to Mirova's babblings, but this proposal for an elite guard struck me as so monstrous that I was roused to protest.

"Surely you don't think that prisoners should never be released?"

"And why not?" she replied. "The country can get along without them."

When Mirova said things like this I had to remind myself: Be careful. This is not an ordinary woman but a fanatical Chekist.

When I could, I tried to distract her from her more blood-

curdling memories. Once I asked her, "What became of Golubov? Why didn't you marry him?"

"Vitiushka? Oh, that poor fellow," she responded cheerily. "I lost track of him in 1935. It was too bad. I was rather fond of him."

The break came, she explained, when she was transferred from Leningrad to Moscow, a promotion in recognition of her work on the Kirov case. They saw each other from time to time after that, and there was one final wild reunion in Leningrad where she had occasion to be on official business. Then he was assigned to work in Tiflis under Beria. Though she tried to get the order transferring him rescinded, nothing could be done. He vanished into thin air.

"Couldn't you have married him before?" I said.

"The devil only knows. I was too busy with my work to give time to personal matters. Also, after my affair with the Cossack captain, I never met a man to satisfy me. Then there was the matter of quarters suitable for setting up a household."

She and Golubov, Mirova told me, had tried once to acquire an apartment and very nearly got themselves into serious trouble. It was in the spring of 1934. On learning that one of the "declassified" women—a member of the former bourgeoisie—was occupying a comfortable flat on Gagarin Street in Leningrad, near the regional headquarters, they determined to get the place for themselves and sought out the manager of the building. The manager, however, had an urgent engagement and could not show it to them. But he said, "Why don't you go up by yourselves? You are military people. You can do without me. Just ring the bell. The woman will let you in. Later we'll see to arrangements."

So they did. A woman about thirty-five years old answered

the doorbell—a stunning creature. When Mirova said they wanted to look at the apartment, she appeared puzzled and repeated, “Look at the apartment?”

“That’s what I said,” Mirova told her. “If we like it we’ll take it over. You’ve lived here long enough. Now it’s time for a proletarian to have it.”

The woman flared up. “You are overreaching yourselves,” she said. “Your authority certainly does not extend over this apartment.”

Ignoring her, Mirova and Golubov pushed their way inside, where there was a boy possibly five years old. The apartment surpassed their expectations. It was truly magnificent. But before they could inspect it thoroughly, the telephone rang. There was a wait while it was explained to the person at the other end of the wire that visitors were there looking at the apartment, and the boy exchanged a few words with “Daddy.” Then Mirova, to her surprise, was asked to take the receiver.

A familiar voice addressed her. “Look here, comrade. This is Kirov speaking,” it said. “You are to apologize to the lady of the house for your rude intrusion, and clear out of there at once. This apartment is not available. Do you understand?” And he slammed down the receiver.

Naturally, Mirova remarked, she did not apologize to that “bourgeois wench.” But she and Golubov did bolt out of the apartment as fast as they could. And that was the end of their search for a place where they could live together.

## *Chapter* XXVIII

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SPRING DAY WHEN I TOOK leave of the Upper-Uralsk Political Isolator. In the group traveling in the police van was an old acquaintance of mine, a former Moscow university student, Vassilieva. She had changed beyond recognition. At twenty-seven, her hair was gray, her complexion faded, her eyes dim. Only her voice, rich and melodious, remained as I remembered it three years before.

We sat beside each other and talked incessantly, sharing our experiences and impressions, and speculating about the future.

In the prison train, four other women joined us. Among them were two old Communist party members, Antipova and Smirnova. But when they discovered that neither Vassilieva nor I belonged to the party, they turned away and ignored us for the rest of the journey.

The trip lasted more than a week. Our destination this time proved to be the Yaroslavl Political Isolator. As we climbed out of the Black Maria at the isolator gate I caught a glimpse of Mirova. She smiled at me, but did not quite dare to greet me.

The isolator consisted of two units—a block of three hundred cells plus quarters for the guards and the administrative personnel. Inside the prison unit, the cells were arranged

in three tiers. The cell doors on each tier opened onto a screened balcony. There was a huge lock on every door. Silent guards stood statue-like at their posts on the balconies, one at every cell.

In general, the food was much the same as in the other isolators—the standard Soviet prison fare. Except for the soup. The soup was abominable. It was made of spoiled, dried vegetables and smelled and tasted horrible.

Within a few months, my teeth began to ache, my gums bled, and I felt sharp pains throughout my body, especially in my left arm, leg, shoulder, and the ear which had been injured during the beatings I received at the hands of Investigator Ignatenko. I was doubled up with pain and clearly in need of medical care. Several days went by. Then at my insistent demand I was transferred to the prison hospital and placed on a diet of fresh vegetables.

All the beds in the hospital were occupied at the time I was admitted and I had to sleep on the floor. Only about a month later was a cot found for me. My closest neighbor in the ward was Liza Semionova, a woman in her late thirties, a Stalinist and former employee of the Kremlin. She was just recovering from a rather serious condition. Her feet had been frost-bitten, and she was suffering from scurvy.

Semionova was relatively a newcomer to our world for she had been in political isolators for about half a year only. Of this time, she had spent four months at the dreaded Solovetsk. It was there that she sustained the injury to her feet.

The injury, as I later learned, was the result of a misunderstanding about Semionova's dossier which had been sent by Beria's men along with her to Solovetsk. The color of the envelope in which the dossier was contained indicated that she was to be assigned to the Nameless Isolator. Accordingly,

she was taken there. But the commandant of that isolator, unsealing the envelope, found that the documents revealed the prisoner's name. This was contrary to regulations; nameless prisoners were required to be identified only by number. The slip-up created a great commotion. The confused officials rushed Semionova into the courtyard and ordered her to stand with her face to the wall while a guard with an automatic rifle stood watch over her. It was a bitter cold day. She had on light shoes, the ones she had worn in the Kremlin at the time of her arrest.

When she could stand the cold no longer and began to scream, the guard pressed her against the wall with his rifle and threatened to shoot her. Semionova remained in that position during the many hours that it took to telephone Moscow and receive new instructions. Then she was carried away, half frozen, to an ordinary political isolator.

Semionova and I did not get to be friends for a long time. At first, the fact that I was not a party member made her shy away from me in distrust. I, on the other hand, was irked by a certain snobbishness in her and what I took to be an air of self-importance. However, the coolness melted. The exchange of minor courtesies necessitated by our nearness to each other contributed to an improvement in our relations. Eventually, we became fast friends.

From my conversations with her I learned that she was the sister-in-law of Gavriil Volkov, the Kremlin chef who had attended Lenin prior to his death. Volkov was also employed as chef at Silver Pines, some years later, when Stalin was courting Roza Kaganovich.

Semionova herself had worked in the Kremlin for seventeen years. She began as an errand girl in Stalin's office at the Politburo, then became a telephone operator on the Kremlin-

NKVD line, and ultimately served as Stalin's secret aide in, what she called, "the chamber for monitoring private conversations."

It was a "most fascinating" job, according to Semionova. She would eavesdrop on private telephone conversations and report them to Stalin. It was also the function of the chamber to install hidden microphones in the homes of key government officials, to enable Stalin to keep a close check on his associates. Most of the information gathered by wire-tapping or hidden microphones cleared through Semionova and was relayed by her to the Leader or to his personal secretary, Poskrebyshev.

Told my name, Semionova instantly showed interest.

"So you are Lermolo!" she exclaimed. "I would never have guessed it. I had pictured you as a sort of siren-like creature, a hard-bitten conspirator with important connections in the capitalist world, a veritable *femme fatale*. I shall never forget how strenuously your godfather Agranov tried to cast you in the leading role in the Kirov trial."

"Why do you call Agranov my godfather?" I asked, amused.

"It was he who dragged you into the case. Didn't you really know that?"

This was news indeed to me. Eager for her to go on, I explained that I had no idea how I happened to be accused of complicity in the Kirov assassination.

"You have Agranov to thank for that," she said, and then she told me in detail of the developments as she knew them from telephone conversations between Agranov, Yagoda, Yezhov, and Stalin.

Yagoda, in Semionova's opinion, had no desire to expand the Kirov affair. He was satisfied with things as they were—that Kirov had been eliminated and that the blame had fallen



on the chief of the Leningrad NKVD, Medved, for "failing to guard and protect one of the top party leaders." Semionova confirmed what I had been told before, that Yagoda believed that Medved coveted his post and was only too happy to have him out of the way. All told, Yagoda was pleased with the turn of events and sought nothing more from the Kirov affair.

Agranov, on the other hand, as the person directly in charge of the investigation, was most eager to play it up. For this reason, he tried to connect Nikolayev with White Guardists and foreign agents and capitalist conspirators.

"In his scheme," said Semionova, "you were to be the connecting link. Agranov tried hard to sell you to Stalin. The two traveled together on the special train from Moscow to Leningrad. Agranov kept in constant touch by radio with the Leningrad office of the NKVD. When he was advised that your name and address were listed in the assassin's notebook, he asked to be given all available information about you. In no time, he had these facts—that you were young and beautiful, the wife of a White Guard, that you were in exile in Pudozh, and that Nikolayev had visited Pudozh frequently."

It was then that Agranov suggested to Stalin that I was the one who had led Nikolayev away from the Bolshevik path, had put him in touch with agents of the international bourgeoisie. Amazing deduction!

Stalin was not impressed with Agranov's theory and called him an "incorrigible Checkist romantic," according to Semionova. Nevertheless, Agranov acted on what he called his intuition and ordered me arrested and brought to Leningrad. Later, he persuaded Stalin—not without difficulty—to see me himself and question me. "I am convinced that she is one of Nikolayev's chief accomplices," he argued. "Believe me, my intuition never fails me."

A friend of Semionova's supplied her with some details of the conversation.

Listening, I became infuriated that I had been dragged into all this trouble because an ambitious little official had had a silly intuition.

"Maybe so," Semionova said calmly. "But you need not upset yourself too much on that score. In any event, you would not have remained long in Pudozh. You were slated to be sent either to a political isolator or to a concentration camp. Stalin had already ordered the system of political exile abolished. He considered it an ineffectual weapon in the struggle against counterrevolution. . . . As for Agranov, he fell victim to his own indiscretions. At least, you're still alive, while he's buried five feet underground."

Agranov met his end, Semionova told me, because of complaints he made to friends about the way he was overworked in connection with the Kirov case, and the way Stalin imposed upon him—requiring him to falsify documents, invent myths, and even produce evidence against his protector Lev Kamenev. All this came to light through tape recordings. One piece of evidence interested me in particular. In his effort to implicate a foreign agent in the Kirov affair, Agranov fixed upon the Finnish consul as having some connection with the natural father of Nikolayev's half-sister Anya. But Stalin objected. For his own devious reasons, Stalin preferred to have the Latvian consul discredited so that there would be an excuse for dismissing him from the country.

This explained the confusion about consuls at the time of my interrogation.

Agranov had courted trouble long before this, Semionova said. When Kamenev was being shipped to a concentration camp in 1935, Agranov was brazen enough to hand him a

parcel with warm clothing. (My mind flew back to the scene I had witnessed in the prison van.) The incident was reported to Stalin by Yezhov, but Stalin let it pass because Agranov at the time was being useful in carrying out a major operation—that of unloading the Leningrad prisons. This action was prompted by the furore created abroad by the wave of executions following Kirov's assassination. The free world was demanding an end to "the Red terror," and the Kremlin found it expedient to halt for the time being the mass liquidations of Oppositionists. Eventually, however, the accumulated knowledge against Agranov was made use of—and Agranov vanished. His wife, an ardent Chkist, cheated the executioner by shooting herself.

Another time, Semionova remarked apropos of something I had said about the strange chain of events touched off by the Kirov killing: "Kirov's death was urgently required by the Kremlin. The Kremlin needed it as a person needs air to breathe. You should have seen how tense Stalin and Poskrebyshv were on the evening of the day Kirov was assassinated."

At four that afternoon, Semionova recalled, she had gone as usual to Poskrebyshv's office to report to him on conversations that had been recorded earlier in the day. But Poskrebyshv did not pay close attention to what she was saying. He seemed perturbed about something.

Suddenly, Stalin appeared—which was surprising, for at that hour it was his habit to rest. He inquired whether there had been a telephone call from Leningrad. Then when Poskrebyshv replied in the negative, Stalin went on to his office. Semionova continued to read her report.

A short while later, Stalin thrust his head out of the door of his office. "It came off!" he exclaimed. "Do you understand? It took place. It happened!"

More was said which gave Semionova to understand that the results of the "happening" were not conclusive and Stalin's presence in Leningrad was required. There was much excitement around the office as Stalin showered Poskrebyshv with orders: a state of emergency . . . military protection for officials . . . files to be sealed, and so forth.

When Stalin had completed his arrangements for departure and returned to his office, Poskrebyshv said to Semionova: "Brace up, Liza, there's lots of work to be done. You are to go to your post immediately. Take along a pillow and blanket for you will eat and sleep at the switchboard. Stay there until I release you."

Semionova did as she was directed, and it was fully a month and a half before she left her post again.

I was curious to know what Yenukidze and Yagoda were doing at the time their plan was being carried out by Nikolayev in Leningrad. Semionova told me that Yenukidze remained in the Kremlin close to the telephone. Yagoda, on the other hand, was "socializing," attending a literary gathering at Maxim Gorky's home just outside of Moscow. It was there that he received a call from Zaporozhets advising him that the "mission was fulfilled." Whereupon he flew to Leningrad, returning to Moscow the following morning.

Semionova's report of Yagoda's telephone conversation with Yenukidze when he got back to town contained one exchange of information that struck me as particularly revealing.

"What I can't understand," said Yagoda after questions had been asked and answered, "is why Stalin was so rude to me when I greeted him at the railroad station in Leningrad."

What had happened, as nearly as Semionova could make out, was this: When Stalin's special train arrived in Leningrad, Yagoda—who had arrived earlier by air—advanced to

meet him, saluted, and presented orally a "report on the untoward occurrence." Thereupon Stalin, in the presence of his entourage and the officials who had gathered to greet him, slapped Yagoda in the face. "You nincompoop," he yelled. "Don't you know how to protect the leaders of the working class?"

Yenukidze's comment on hearing of the incident was: "It's your own fault. Why do you always try to force your presence on Stalin? I've warned you many times. Don't try to impress him with your services. He doesn't like it." Then by way of consolation he added, "Don't worry. Everything will be all right."

However, things weren't all right for either Yagoda or Yenukidze. The first to go was Yenukidze. There was the matter of the revision of his manuscript. Yenukidze was writing a history of the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus, and Stalin objected that he was not given the prominence he deserved. However, Yenukidze refused to distort the historic facts by rewriting the text at Stalin's dictation. Also, Yenukidze engaged in an indiscreet conversation (revealed by a tape recording) in which he referred to Stalin and his wife Roza Kaganovich as the "Kremlin maniacs." Finally, there was the shooting at Nalchik in the Caucasus where Stalin was on vacation, when bullets whistled over the heads of his hunting party and Lazar Kaganovich received a minor injury.

There was every reason to believe that the attack was a well-planned plot against Stalin's life. Who was behind it was never discovered, but Stalin and Roza decided that Yenukidze was the master mind. Roza was sure of it. The fact that she disliked Yenukidze, Semionova pointed out, could have influenced her judgment. It was Yenukidze who had tried to get

Zoya Nikitina for Stalin—Yenukidze who had “bungled” the arrangements for Nadezhda Allilueva’s funeral.

The upshot of it all was that Yenukidze was arrested and put in the Lubyanka Prison, where a year later he was joined by Yagoda. Both were indicted in connection with the case of the Rightist-Trotskyist Bloc. Yagoda was executed after the trial early in 1938. Yenukidze was shot even before the trial took place.

“One must admit,” commented Semionova, “that Yenukidze, though he had sinned heavily in his life, died a relatively honest man. He didn’t betray anyone. I can’t say the same for Yagoda.”

Semionova had heard that Roza Kaganovich made several efforts to intercede on Yagoda’s behalf, and this precipitated a violent quarrel with Stalin who told her “not to stick your nose into affairs that do not concern you.” Their relationship was further strained when Roza, her feelings hurt, complained about Stalin to friends.

“Soon it became known to everyone in the Kremlin,” said Semionova, “that Roza’s star was in eclipse.”

“Is it really?” I asked.

“But of course,” she replied. “The new candidate for the role of Stalin’s wife is the aviatrix Marina Raskova, who made the dramatic flight across the Siberian taiga.”

Semionova and I spent about a week together in the hospital ward, before she was removed to surgery. I found her stories of Kremlin life enthralling. By the peculiar nature of her position, and her long period of service, she had a fund of information inaccessible even to those in the topmost circles of the Kremlin. It was ugly information, to be sure, but it enabled me to understand and assess my own situation more clearly.

Woman-like, perhaps, we were both curious about Stalin's several "wives"—four if one included Marina Raskova. Semionova had quite a bit to say about two of them: Nadezhda Allilueva and Roza Kaganovich.

The latter, she declared, was a ravishing beauty—breath-taking. In comparison, other renowned beauties—like Kalinin's mistress Malinovskaya, or Voroshilov's Semionova, or Budenny's Mikhailova—were painted dolls. Other people, too, found Roza dazzling, including many men of talent. Semionova had seen a sheaf of sonnets by Kuibishev dedicated to her, and Maxim Gorky was said to have left an uncompleted manuscript in which she was the central figure. Both works were sealed in the Kremlin archives.

Roza belonged to Stalin's bloodiest period, the years between 1932 and 1938. Her lot, Semionova commented, was not a happy one.

Beside Roza, Nadezhda Allilueva was simple, plain, colorless—insignificant. Semionova recalled the night of her death when she was wakened by Poskrebyshov on the telephone asking her to come to Stalin's apartment to help with arrangements for the funeral. By the time she arrived, the body had been placed in the coffin. There was no opportunity to get a good look at Allilueva's face because the lower part was concealed by flowers and the hair was combed in a way—unbecomingly, Semionova thought—to conceal most of the forehead.

Semionova was there when the Allilueva relatives arrived, and the children were brought in to see their mother. She recalled the tears and hysterical outcries, and the wretched appearance of Stalin when he arrived late in the day flanked by Voroshilov and Molotov. His face was wrinkled, his eyes swollen as he looked around the room—at the Alliluevs and the children—then leaned over the bier to kiss Nadezhda. As he

was about to return to his study, Yenukidze went up to him to say that the Alliluev family requested that the body be buried in one of the Moscow cemeteries, without cremation. Stalin hesitated, then nodded his assent.

After that, farewells were said, the children were taken away, and the lid of the coffin was nailed down.

Semionova confirmed what others had told me, that Moscow was stunned by the news of Allilueva's death. She was less important than the fact that she was Stalin's wife. For he had always disliked publicity about his private life, and gone to great lengths to suppress it. Only those close to the Kremlin knew the more intimate facts about his relations with women. So it was electrifying to have Allilueva's role acknowledged in the broadcast of her death. The rumors were many, and the official communiqué, a bare twenty-five words or so, did not satisfy public curiosity. Nor was curiosity satisfied when Moscovites by the thousands lined up to view the body—which was accepted custom—and discovered the coffin closed. This added fuel to the speculations.

The public funeral was a mistake, Semionova thought, and Stalin realized it. Crowds thronged the streets all the way to the cemetery, occasionally breaking through the lines of militia and halting the procession. There was confusion and even something menacing about the occasion. The orations at the grave were dull. Stalin could find little to say, and no provision had been made for Nadezhda's father, Sergei Alliluev, to speak a few words.

I asked Semionova whether the cause of Allilueva's death had ever been determined. Her answer was: "What for? If Stalin did not think it necessary to reveal the cause, who would dare to pry? Besides, no one cared one way or another. Who was Allilueva? Just an upstart who had climbed on the Leader's neck and then tumbled down."



## *Chapter* X X I X

MY STAY AT THE PRISON HOSPITAL CAME TO AN end a few days after Semionova left. The beds were needed for other prisoners requiring urgent medical care. Since I had been "panippered long enough," I was sent back to the isolator.

This time I was placed in a small, solitary cell. It was much colder and darker than any cell I had been in—and much, much damper. Its thick, stone walls were always moist, and the dampness seemed to seep into my bones. I spent fourteen months there. It was not until the autumn of 1940 that the authorities finally recalled my existence and transferred me to another isolator. During those fourteen months I had no human contacts. My neighbors, freezing in the adjoining cells, were unfamiliar with the prison alphabet. This made it impossible for me to communicate with them by tapping. And we could not exchange notes because none of us had pencil or paper. I was even unable to find out who my neighbors were and for what "sins" they were being punished. Day in and day out, I spent in total seclusion, without meeting a soul or exchanging a word.

To fill the long idle hours, I practiced "psychological self-preservation."

Religiously, I carried out the exercise prescribed by Orlovsky in Solovetsk. I engaged in protracted conversations daily with

a "wise and close friend"—myself. I retold myself in minutest detail all the stories I had heard from my fellow prisoners.

The startling revelations made by Trushina, Mirova, and Semionova were especially helpful in clarifying the puzzling events affecting Kirov, Allilueva, Yenukidze, and the Niko-layevs. At the same time they explained the reasons for my own imprisonment, which in turn put an end to my tortuous speculations. In this way I was able to retain my mental balance. I shall ever be grateful to those former cellmates of mine.

There was no way of determining the location of the new, unfamiliar isolator. It seemed to stand in a howling wilderness. A raw, autumn wind almost swept me off my feet as I came out of the Black Maria that had brought me from the railroad station to the courtyard. All that my glance was able to take in on the short walk from the automobile to the prison office was an unusually high stone wall, a deserted courtyard, a barbed wire fence dividing the yard, several large buildings on both sides of the fence, and over and above it all, a cold, overcast sky.

Our processing was brief. All told, including the bath and the cropping of my hair, it took no more than an hour. Then I was locked in a cell situated in a sort of semi-basement. I looked around me and my heart sank. The cell was not only dark and cold, but also foul-smelling. The stench was unbearable. A dense growth of fungi covered the lower part of its dirty gray walls, and there were two to three inches of water covering part of the cement floor. The bed was folded and locked against the wall. So was the stool. In addition to bed and stool, there was a table and a chamber pot—and nothing else.

I paced the cell in my thin boots, which were anything but

waterproof. My feet soon got soaked. The air I exhaled condensed into steam-like vapor. I was cold and miserable. When it seemed that I could not stand it a moment longer, I began to weep; tears streamed down my cheeks, then my sobs turned into hysterical shrieks.

This had no apparent effect on anyone, although I could see an indifferent eye glued to the keyhole. I beat against the door with my fists and feet. I demanded to be transferred to another cell. The eye continued to survey me, until I finally realized that I was in the position of a guinea pig who was reacting as expected. Then I became ashamed of my behavior and, to spite the Chekists, I decided to pull myself together. Drawing on what strength I had left, I forced myself to be calm. The evening dragged on; I thought it would never end. I was thoroughly chilled, but somehow managed to keep control of myself.

At the appointed hour, the cell door opened and in came a dull-faced brute wearing a cavalry coat and high waterproof boots. Without uttering a word, he removed the lock and let the bed down for the night. Exhausted, I threw myself on it and in a semiconscious state turned and tossed till morning.

Around dinner time the next day I was transferred to a dry cell on the second floor. Nailed to the wall of the new cell was the table of regulations bearing the imprint of the Vladimirsk Political Isolator.

The furnishings of the cell, the food, the regimen, the exercise periods were identical with those in other isolators. After I had become acclimated to the new place, I resumed my schedule of self-prescribed activities. And again I endeavored to establish contact with my neighbors.

From the cell to the right there was no response. But, to my boundless joy, familiar rhythmic sounds came from the wall to

the left. They resembled the rustling of leaves. My neighbor wasn't tapping but scratching the wall with his nails.

He, it turned out, was a Georgian, forty years old, a Communist party member, a lawyer, and a Chekist. For a period of five years, he had held the post of director of the Law Academy of the USSR. For six months he had been in this isolator, and his case was still pending. Until recently he was held in a cell in the so-called "cultural" sector, where inmates were either foreigners or people formerly in the foreign service of the Soviet government—embassy and consular officials, Comintern agents, employees of the foreign division of the NKVD. The commandant of the sector was an old friend of his, a Latvian.

When I asked why he had been imprisoned, I received an involved, long-winded reply that seemed to boil down to the fact that he was allegedly the author of a syllabus for the special schools of the NKVD training the new type of Chekist cadres—the so-called "zoological weapons." He was accused, he told me, of having deliberately committed some very serious "methodological" blunders in drafting the syllabus.

I was reminded of Mirova's fantastic scheme for creating an elite guard of delinquents and degenerates. And I thought of the new-type, efficient, robot-like guards I had encountered recently.

For several days my neighbor pestered me with questions about the legal rights of prisoners in political isolators. His endless queries wearied me. To carry on this sort of conversation by tapping taxed my strength. First of all, one had to be very cautious not to attract the attention of the guards. Secondly, one had to express one's thoughts laconically and be able to comprehend quickly the equally laconic statements of one's questioner. All this involved intense concentration. It

was such a severe strain that after an hour or so of "telegraphing," I would drop to the floor completely exhausted.

Here is a sampling of our conversation:

"Adv(ise) me," he would tap on the wall, "how to proc(eed) to gain my rel(case)."

Then before I had time to answer him: "Tell (me) how (I) can (have) (my) relat(ives) visit (me) here."

"We here no long(er) have rela(tives). They (are) either und(er) arr(est) or (have) renoun(ced) us."

"How do (I) get (a) def(ense) att(orney) (to) ta(ke) (my) case? I'd like (to) subp(oe)na witn(esses) on my beh(alf)."

"The Che(kists) don't app(rove) (of) def(ense) att(or)neys). They'll supp(ly) their own witn(esses)."

"I can't app(ear) (at) (the) trial witho(ut) witn(esses), witho(ut) def(ense) att(orney)."

I was amused that such an important official in the Ministry of Justice was so little informed about the political isolator system.

"Don't exp(ect) to (be) tri(ed). Give up (the) id(ca). It's hopel(ess). Can tea(ch) you syst(em) (to) reta(in) your ment(al) bal(ance)."

"Wh(at) sys(tem)? Wh(at) do I nee(d) it for? I don't int(end) (to) rema(in) in (the) iso(lator) long. (I) exp(ect) to (be) relea(sed) soon. (The) war(dén) proni(i(sed) (to) assi(gn) (me) for work (in) his off(ice). There (I) will (have) oppor(tunity) to press my ca(se)."

After one of these conversations, my neighbor was gone for an entire week. His cell remained vacant. Then suddenly he returned for a few minutes. Hurriedly he tapped out the message: "Was (put) through (the) conve(yor). Am wri(ting) depo(sition) re Yenukidze."

Again he was gone for about ten days. When he was returned to his cell, he informed me: "They (are) bea(ting) me (with) a rub(ber) club. (They) dem(and) I give deta(iled) rep(ort) of Yenuk(idze's) meet(ings) with Transcau(casian) nationa(lists)."

In March, 1941, I was transferred to another isolator. I have no idea what happened to my neighbor.

When I was brought to the railroad station to board the train that would take me to the new isolator, I was not feeling too well. But I decided not to mention my indisposition. I did not want to be deprived of the trip, since it offered a welcome break in my monotonous existence.

Sharing the compartment with me in the scaled prison car were two elderly Caucasian women. Their attitude toward me was manifestly unfriendly. Unlike most prisoners, they showed no inclination to find out who I was and what I was charged with, or to learn whether I had any "news" from the outside world to impart. In the evening, they surreptitiously said their prayers, and then became engrossed in a whispered conversation in their native tongue. I tried to speak to them in Russian, but they ignored me and drew closer together.

The vibration of the train—the hammering of the wheels against the rails—the sensation of being in motion had a cheering effect on me. But before long, I began to feel dizzy, chills ran down my spine, my eyelids grew heavy.

By the next day it was apparent that I was very ill. My traveling companions softened toward me, spoke to me in Russian. The voice of one of them seemed oddly familiar to me. She reminded me of someone, but I could not place her.

. . . It was five days or so later that I came to in a hospital ward at the Tambovsk Political Isolator, having been taken off

the train while I was in a coma. Here I spent close to two weeks. Then when my temperature was down a bit, I was forced to resume my journey, even though I was barely able to stand on my feet. This time I traveled in a passenger car escorted by three guards. The window and glass door of the compartment were heavily curtained. I stayed in my berth during most of the trip. The guards kept to themselves and hardly spoke to me.

The train was moving southward. Toward the end of the fourth day, we reached our destination. There was the usual Black Maria waiting at the station. Two hours later, we drove into the courtyard of the N—sk Prison.

It was a calm, spring evening. A radio was blaring in the distance. Beyond the confines of the prison one could hear the pulsations of city life. They stirred within me a longing to be there—where there were light, joy, love. . . .

After completing the brief formalities at the prison office, I was placed in a small, solitary cell on the first floor. I did not sleep too well that first night. There was too much commotion both in the prison block and in the adjoining administrative offices. Nonetheless, I woke up in the morning in a rather tranquil mood. As soon as I opened my eyes, I rushed to the window.

Prisoners are always drawn to the window. A window is still a window, even if it is covered with iron shutters. There is an irresistible urge to look out, to catch a glimpse of the free world—if only through a tiny crack in the shutters, if only with one eye. Even in the darkest days—during the dreadful periods spent in the cellar of the Upper-Uralsk Isolator and in the “sobering cell” of the Solovetsk Isolator—I endeavored to keep alive within my heart the feeling of belonging to the world outside—the beautiful, unshackled, rational, free world.

I clung to the belief that I was only temporarily torn away from it and would soon perhaps be able to recapture the happiness I once knew and lost.

For a prisoner the only days that hold interest are those spent in traveling from one place of detention to another. Also the first days at a new prison. But once you have settled in the new place and have familiarized yourself with the minor differences in routine, life resumes the same old pattern—long, seemingly endless days, unbroken except for meals, exercise, and your own unhappy thoughts.

My neighbors. In the cell to the right was a man afflicted with a bad cough. He apparently was unfamiliar with the prison alphabet code. In the cell to the left, judging by the voices, were two women. They ignored my tapping. But though I was disheartened, I persisted in my attempts to establish contact with them.

"I am Lermolo," I tapped. "I'm held here in connection with the Kirov affair. I was recently transferred from Vladimir. Let me know what news you've heard. Who are you? In which case are you involved?"

Several days later the women finally responded. Timidly, they inquired: "When and where were you arrested?"

"December, 1934, in Pudozh," I replied.

"Whom did you know in Pudozh among the exiled Caucasians?"

"I taught Russian to several Caucasian women there. Their names have slipped me," I answered evasively. For one did not give the names of friends for fear of involving them.

"On what street in Pudozh did you live?"

"Number 17, Alyabyev Street, at the corner of Petrovsk."

"Elizaveta Lermolo! Is that possibly you? How on earth did that happen? I am Fatima Shagry. Your pupil. My cell-



mate here is Selima Alimova, also from Pudozh. We were both brought here from Vladimir. We have no idea what we're charged with."

"How long has it been since you left Vladimir?"

"Three weeks."

"Were there any other women with you on the trip from Vladimir?"

"Yes, a Russian woman who was seriously ill. She was taken off the train. I doubt if she is still alive."

So it was Fatima whose voice had seemed familiar. And she had not recognized me, did not now realize that I was the woman taken from the train.

That evening I had a peculiar feeling. My emotions were mixed. I felt at once hopeful and apprehensive. By nightfall, something indefinable gripped me and I gave vent to long and bitter tears.

When morning came, the women and I resumed our communication. We exchanged news, shared impressions, reminisced about the past, and speculated about the future.

A month went by. No one bothered us. Then in the middle of June we were called up, singly, for interrogation. Judging by the questions put to me, the NKVD seemed to be preparing a case against the "bourgeois nationalists" of Caucasia. I was apparently to be cast in the role of connecting link between the Caucasian nationalists and the alleged "White Guard underground."

I made it clear to the investigator at the very outset that his efforts were a waste of time since I had never had any contact with the so-called "bourgeois nationalists" and had never heard of the existence of a White Guard underground in Pudozh. Unless I told the "whole truth," forceful measures would be taken against me, he warned. But the threats of

investigators had ceased to frighten me. At least, I was sure now that no amount of coercion could make me confess to crimes I hadn't committed. To be sure, the system of exacting confessions was not what it had been in the past. Then it was the responsibility of the investigator. Now, I understood, the investigator formulated the over-all plan of questioning and the dirty work was done by the "new breed" of Chekists, who employed little subtlety and used in lieu of argument a rubber club.

However, I was not put to a final test. Something seemed to be up. We didn't know just what. More than a week passed and none of us was called up for interrogation. We tried to figure out what had happened. Our best guess was that the Chekists, frustrated by our flat refusal to confess, had queried Moscow for new instructions.

Later we learned that our obstinacy had nothing to do with it. The investigation was suspended for a weightier reason. The Soviet Union had been drawn into the Second World War. The Chekists had been assigned to new tasks, related directly to the war effort. Our case, no longer regarded as urgent, was put off for a more convenient time.

With the outbreak of the war, our prison population increased sharply. At the same time, conditions in the prison became worse. The iron bed was removed from my cell. In its stead, triple-decked wooden bunks were rigged up. Five women prisoners were thrown in with me. They had been accused of some unspecified crime connected with the war. A day or two later, they were removed from the cell and replaced by another group of women, who in turn soon gave way to others. There was a constant flow of prisoners through my cell. At times, it was so crowded that there was not enough

room for the women on the bunks and some of them had to sleep on the floor.

Early in the winter, bedbugs appeared. They multiplied rapidly and made our lives miserable. With the approach of summer weather, our cell became virtually an inferno. The oppressive heat and the lack of fresh air caused frequent fainting spells.

Other prisoners, of course, suffered as we did. Fatima Shagry died. Alinova barely kept alive. The men managed to hold out.

Early in August, 1942, one of my cellmates returned from the infirmary with exciting news. She had heard that the prison was to be evacuated. The prisoners were to be taken by foot to a camp on the shores of the Caspian Sea. The date set for the evacuation was, reportedly, August 12. The sick and physically weak were to be left behind. The prison itself was to be blown up.

We did not doubt the truth of this report. Of late, we had noticed that there was unusual activity in the corridors. Guards and officials ran about madly. Prisoners were no longer summoned for interrogation. None of us was let out for exercise.

I cannot say that the news about the evacuation cheered me particularly. I did not relish the idea of making the long journey by foot, and the prospect of being left behind appealed to me even less. There was no telling what the Chekists planned to do with the prisoners incapable of making the trek. Certainly, there was little reason to expect tolerant treatment.

In my physical condition, to march several hundred kilometers was out of the question. I could see myself collapsing

after the first ten kilometers and my lifeless body being thrown into a ditch. With faith in His mercy, I prayed to the dear Lord, placed my soul in His hands, and prepared myself to meet my end calmly.

However, unexpected military developments upset the Soviet timetable: The city of N. fell into the hands of the Nazis a week ahead of schedule. In a surprise move, the enemy dropped a large force of paratroops on the outskirts of the city, and on the morning of August 7 we suddenly heard heavy artillery fire in the city and the bursting of shells nearby. The prison was thrown into a panic.

Most frightened of all were the Chekists. Their hysterical voices shouting commands mingled with the panting of men carrying heavy loads and with the groaning of automobile motors in the courtyard. Meanwhile the shells were exploding closer and closer.

Then came a series of tremors. The plaster on the ceiling of our cell began to chip. Large chunks fell to the floor. The air became filled with dust. Some of the prisoners were saying their prayers. Others crowded around the locked door, kicking and banging against it, alternately swearing at the guards and begging them for mercy.

One could hear the last car tearing at breakneck speed out of the prison courtyard. For a moment there was quiet. Then a deafening blast . . . a wall in the cell caved in . . . I lost balance . . . someone stepped on my foot . . . on my chest.

. . .

It was broad daylight when I came to in a clean bed, in surroundings that were white and spotless. I could not move. My right leg felt inflamed.

In the ward were several beds occupied by women in neat white hospital robes. The beds and the patients looked im-

maculate. On the night tables beside each bed were vases with flowers, bottles of milk. What a wonderful prison hospital, I thought to myself.

Two men in white were bending over me, binding my wounds.

"How is the patient feeling?" inquired the elder one. I smiled and tried to thank him, but my tongue was numb. The physician felt my pulse, then said encouragingly: "You'll be all right. You're out of danger now. The wounds will heal in no time. Your leg may take longer. But you'll be all right."

He gave orders to discontinue artificial feeding and to place me on a light diet. His voice was pleasant, his face intelligent. There was nothing Chekist about him. An incredible thought crossed my mind: *Could it be that the prison authorities had temporarily transferred me to a free hospital?*

A nurse seated herself at my bedside. She was holding some papers. She wanted to know my name. Strange, I thought. Is it possible that they don't know who I am? Immediately I was on guard. The prisoner's instinct asserted itself. I became cautious and tried to evade a direct reply.

"Why, nurse? Is anyone asking for me?"

"No. I have to keep a list of all the patients," the nurse explained almost apologetically. "You have been with us for several days and I haven't registered you yet. You were brought here unconscious. There were no documents on you."

She had a gentle smile, the kind of smile that I had not seen in many years. I wanted to ask her how I happened to be transferred here, and why the prison authorities had not sent along my documents. But instead of putting these questions to her, I inquired innocently: "Where am I? Who brought me here?"

The nurse informed me in her soft, pleasant voice that I was

in the city hospital, that I had been brought here by German soldiers on the day that the city fell, and that I must have been injured when one of the municipal buildings was blown up.

Her simple, business-like report had an electrifying effect on me. I was eager to ply her with questions: How far had the Soviet forces retreated? Where was the NKVD now? When had the convoy of prisoners departed? What had happened to the disabled prisoners? How were the Germans treating them? But I was afraid that these questions might betray the fact that I belonged to the despised prison world. I therefore limited myself to an innocuous query: "Was I the only one brought here?"

"Oh, no!" she replied. "There was a truck-load of injured and maimed people, about twenty of them. But only two of that group are still here—you and an old man who is in a coma. The rest drifted away that very first day."

I do not know whether the nurse noticed how rapturously I listened to her, how deeply touched I was by the information she gave me so dispassionately. Surely she must have noticed something, for how could I have concealed from her the joy I felt at my fabulous good fortune? Mine was the feeling of one suddenly catapulted from the darkness of hell into God's bright sunshine.

But though there was joy and music in my soul, even at this triumphant moment my emotions were mixed. I was free, but by whose grace? By the grace of the enemies of my land. I was free, but could I return to a normal life? I was sick, physically exhausted. And the NKVD was still too close for comfort.

One thing I resolved. I must get away as quickly as I could, and as far as possible. In the meantime I must take care not to disclose anything about myself.

"What did you say your name is, Madame?" The nurse had again picked up the registration blank.

I had to tell her something. But what? I couldn't give her the name by which I was known to the prison authorities. After a minute's thought, I decided to use my married name. The nurse jotted it down.

"Your age?"

"Thirty-nine."

"Only thirty-nine? I had taken you for much older. Your address?"

Without realizing what I was saying, I gave her my aunt's address in the city of S.

The nurse told me that one of the hospital officials was going to S. the following week to pick up medical supplies. If I wanted to, she said, I could send a message with him to my family.

"I'd love to. But is it possible to obtain"—and here I probably gave myself away—"pencil and paper?"

"I should think so. Even pen and ink and an envelope," she replied with a smile.

A week later news of me reached the city of S. via two channels: one note I sent with the hospital official, another with a former patient in my ward who was returning to her home in S. There was no regular mail service in those days.

Despite the excellent care and food, my wounds were healing much too slowly and I continued to feel very weak.

One morning after a rubdown and a hearty breakfast, the nurse handed me a mirror and comb and suggested that I put my hair in order. During the preceding four years, I had had no opportunity to see my reflection in a mirror, and consequently I no longer had any idea what I looked like. I knew,

of course, without the aid of a mirror, that I had lost a great deal of weight and undoubtedly had become pale and emaciated. I was prepared for that. I pictured myself looking probably as gaunt and haggard as the anarchist girl Glafirova whom I had met at the Krasnoyarsk Isolator.

With child-like excitement, I grabbed the mirror, raised it to my face—and nearly died!

Staring at me from the mirror was a totally unfamiliar face—the face of an old woman, with dry, wrinkled skin, faded eyes, sparse, matted gray hair. . . .

A numbness came over me. For days I was in the depths of despair.

*Is this what I look like? Where can I go looking like that?*  
I could think of nothing else for a long time.



## *Chapter* X X X

TIME WENT ON. THE PATIENTS WHO WERE originally in the ward with me left the hospital. Others came to occupy the beds. There was also an almost complete turn over in the hospital personnel. The nurse who registered me was taken away by the Germans to work in the Reich.

The new patients and their visitors were delighted with the Germans. All one heard was praise of German medicine, German technique, German order, German culture, German discipline.

No one seemed interested in me personally. Still, I felt uneasy.

Listening to the conversations about me, I gradually pieced together the circumstances that had led to my release from the Chekist jailers. As early as July the Reds had prepared for the orderly evacuation of the city, including the NKVD prisons. Plans had been carefully drafted designating the municipal establishments which were to be moved eastward and those which were to be blown up or set fire to at the last minute. The evacuation itself, however, was postponed from day to day, due to the seesawing fortunes of war. The German advance in the Northern Caucasus had slowed down. Their drive was halted near Rostov-on-the-Don, about seven hundred kilo-

meters away, where the Red Army inflicted a series of shattering blows.

By the early part of August it was assumed that the city was no longer in immediate danger of capture by the Germans. The city fathers decided that for the next several weeks, surely until the end of August, N. was secure from enemy attack. But the Germans upset this reckoning by descending like a snowstorm fifteen or twenty days ahead of schedule. During the night of August 7, under cover of a heavy air barrage, they dropped nearby a paratroop detachment—a motorized unit equipped with field artillery pieces. Encountering no resistance from the local garrison, the detachment moved into the city in the morning.

The unscheduled appearance of the Nazis caught the Communists off guard, and the Reds were now faced with the necessity of fleeing the city as fast as they could to save their skins. This they did, leaving behind them municipal properties, personal belongings, and in many instances their wives and children.

Of all the municipal institutions marked for destruction, the demolition squads of the NKVD managed to blow up—and at that none too successfully—only the textile factory; the military hospital which held a number of seriously wounded Red Army men; and the NKVD Combine, where the prisoners were left locked in the cells. There had been no time to evacuate them.

The Germans that same day hurriedly mobilized the residents of the city to dig out the people buried under the ruins of the hospital and the prison. The total rescued numbered about fifty. Those who had sustained only minor injuries quickly scattered in various directions. The seriously hurt, I among them, were taken to the city hospital.

In the hospital, too, the prisoners did not linger long. As soon as they regained any measure of strength, they scampered away. There was no one to stop them, nor was there any reason to stop them.

The end of September came, and there was no word yet from my aunt. Was she still living in S.? Was she, indeed, still alive? I had no way of knowing.

My wounds were healing rather well. But my leg continued to give me trouble. I could not stand on it, even though the doctor insisted that I try to exercise it. The best I could do was to hobble about the ward with the aid of crutches.

The people in the hospital were no longer enthusiastic about the Germans and their "new order." Newly admitted patients brought depressing reports from the outside world. They spoke of the cruel treatment accorded the local populations by the Nazis, of their atrocities against the Jews, of their ruthless extortion of produce from the farmers. On the other hand, one heard laudatory accounts of the growth and effectiveness of the partisan movement—told sotto voce.

I tried to mingle as little as possible with the people in the hospital, so as not to reveal anything about myself inadvertently. There was the danger that word about me might spread to the partisans and, through them, reach the Chekists. I was determined not to fall into their hands again.

Rousing from sleep one cool, October morning, I found to my great surprise a bouquet of flowers on the bedside table and a note. My aunt must have arrived, I thought. Delightedly, I reached for the note.

"May the fragrance of these roses convey my love to you. God's blessing, dearest, on your new path to life. Misha."

My husband's handwriting! I dashed madly around the hospital in search of him. He had come the night before, I learned, but the doctor on duty would not permit him to see me that late. So he went away leaving the flowers and note.

As soon as the gates were opened that morning, my husband returned, and we met on the ivy-covered veranda overlooking the hospital grounds. It was the greatest joy to be once more in each other's arms.

The obese, bewhiskered old man was hardly recognizable as the youthful Misha I had known twelve years before. Nor did he at first recognize me, even though I had succeeded during the preceding two months in regaining much weight and improving my general appearance. But we wasted little time then in mutual examination. After the first happy, forgetful moments there were questions to ask and answer and he must tell me how word of me had reached him. It seems that my dear old aunt had received my messages in August but could not come for me because the Germans would not permit her to travel to N., which was designated as lying "within the zone of military operations." So instead, through the aid of some kind people, she notified my husband—who was living on a collective farm about eighty kilometers from N. after completing a ten-year sentence in an NKVD corrective labor camp. He too encountered difficulties in getting to me. When a pass was refused him he attempted to leave camp without a pass, and for this he was put to forced labor on a road-repair project for two weeks.

But, thank God, we were reunited. We were both free. And I again had clothes of my own! The important thing now was to get as far as possible from the Soviet lines.

A few days later, the two of us left for the Don Region, to

our "place of permanent residence," as the pass stated. But, alas, we were not destined to remain long in our native Don. Early in 1943, the Red Army (and following in its wake, the Chekists) was nearing Rostov-on-the-Don. There was nothing to do but move on farther to the West. And we kept on moving as the Red Army continued its advance westward, until eventually we were drawn into the flowing mass of refugees which for a period of a year constituted a sort of vanguard to the retreating Nazi armies.

We had no idea where we were going. We had no say in choosing our itinerary. It was done for us by various committees, with their refugee hostels and their refugee soup kitchens and all the other concomitants of refugee life in those grim, unsettled days.

In 1944, my husband and I were arrested by the Nazis and placed in a transitional forced labor camp—the Strasshof, near Vienna, Austria. The reason for our arrest was that we had befriended and taken into our refugee home in Brashov, Rumania, a seven-year-old Jewish boy whose parents the Nazis had sent off to a concentration camp.

Then early in 1945, the White Russian General Shkuro (who was later turned over to the Reds and hanged in Moscow in 1947) took several hundred of us out of Strasshof and brought us to a Cossack encampment in Northern Italy. From there, in the month of May, we made our way across the Alps to Lienz, Austria, where a few weeks later we fell into a new trap, the most inhuman of all: the forced repatriation to the USSR.

During the very first day of the repatriation period, I came face to face with several Chekists from the Yaroslavl Political Isolator, the guards who used to take me out on my exercise walks. Although they were now attired in natty British-type

uniforms, they had not changed in other respects. They twisted the arms of men and women resisting repatriation with the same old Chekist virtuosity that they displayed in Yaroslavl.

We escaped repatriation by fleeing to the mountains, under the fire of British guns. (Or, were they Soviet Chekist guns—who knows?) Earning our bread by heavy toil, and hiding constantly from Soviet Repatriation Missions and Soviet secret agents, our days dragged on, seemingly without purpose or hope.

Only in 1950 did we at last find sanctuary, and a life worth living, in this blessed land, America!

